







Linnet Corley  
Didsbury  
January 1983





LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES



*C. Monnet del.*

*Patus sculp.*

# LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

OR

*LETTERS COLLECTED IN A PRIVATE SOCIETY  
AND PUBLISHED FOR THE INSTRUCTION  
OF OTHERS*

BY

CHODERLOS DE LACLOS

TRANSLATED BY

ERNEST DOWSON

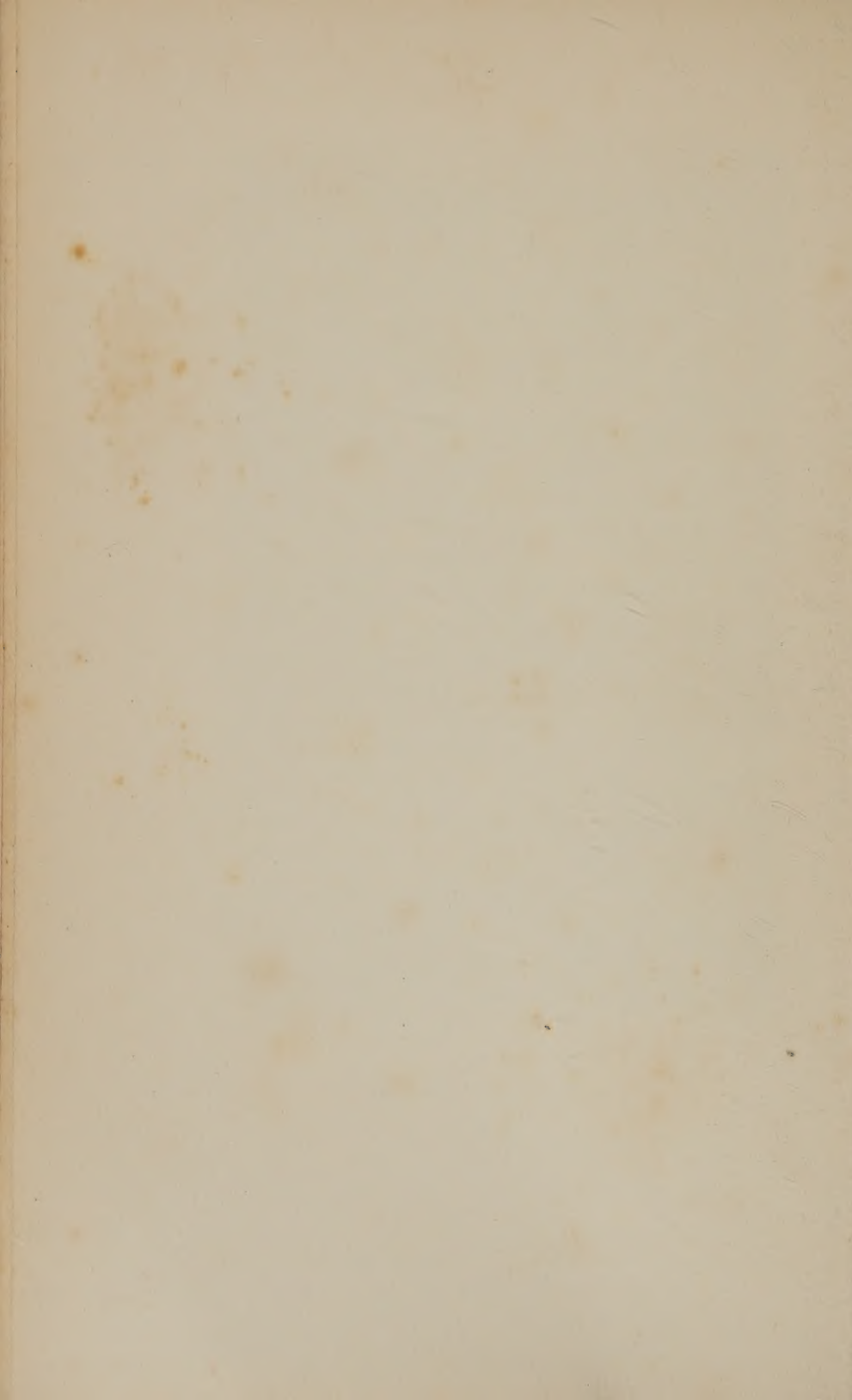
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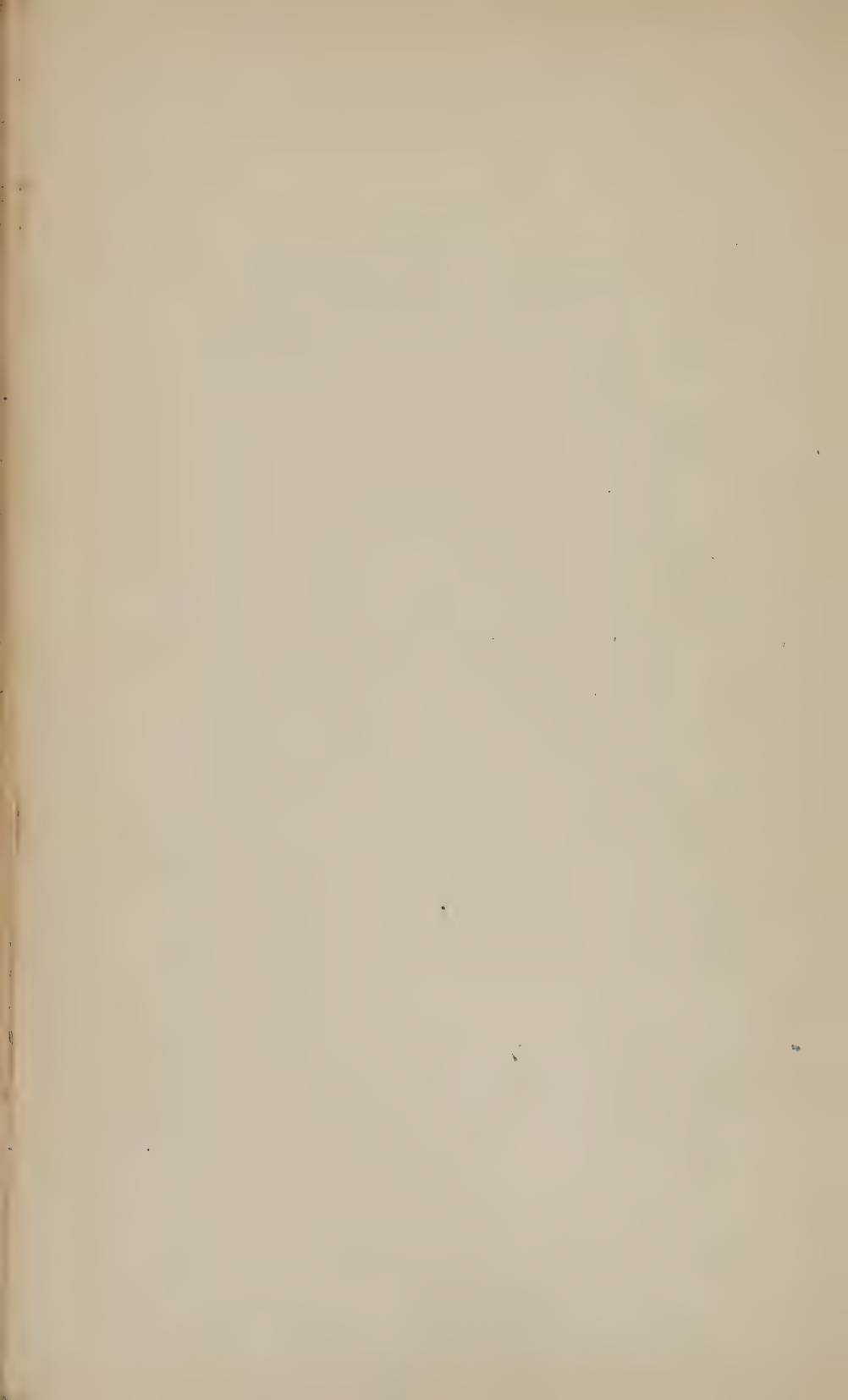
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# LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

## LETTER THE NINETY-FIRST

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

IN consternation at your letter, Madame, I am still ignorant as to how I can reply to it. Doubtless, if I needs must choose between your unhappiness and my own, it is for me to sacrifice myself, and I do not hesitate: but such important interests deserve, so it seems to me, to be, before all, investigated and discussed, and how can that be contrived, if we are to speak and see each other no more?

What! whilst the sweetest of sentiments unite us, shall an empty fear suffice to separate us, perhaps beyond return! In vain shall tender friendship and ardent love reclaim their rights: their voice shall not be heard: and why? What then is this pressing danger which besets you? Ah, believe me, such fears so lightly conceived are already, it seems to me, potent enough reasons for security.

Permit me to tell you that I find here traces of the unfavourable impressions that have been given you about me. One does not tremble before the man one esteems;



one does not, above all, drive away him whom one has judged worthy of a certain friendship: it is the dangerous man whom one dreads and shuns.

Who, however, was ever more respectful and submissive than myself? Already, you may observe, I am circumspect in my language; I no longer permit myself those names so sweet, so dear to my heart, which it never ceases to give you in secret. It is no longer the faithful and unhappy lover, receiving the counsels and the consolations of a tender and sensitive friend; it is the accused before his judge, the slave before his master. Doubtless these new titles impose new duties; I pledge myself to fulfil them all. Listen to me, and, if you condemn me, I obey the verdict and I go. I promise more: do you prefer the tyranny which judges without a hearing? Do you feel you possess the courage to be unjust? Command, and I will still obey.

But this judgment, or this command, let me hear it from your own lips. And why, you will ask me in your turn. Ah, if you put this question, how little you know of love and of my heart! Is it nothing then to see you once again? Nay, when you shall have brought despair into my soul, perhaps one consoling glance will prevent me from succumbing to it. In short, if I must needs renounce the love, and the friendship, for which alone I exist, at least you shall see your work, and your pity will abide with me; even if I do not merit this slight favour, I am prepared, methinks, to pay dearly for the hope of obtaining it.

What! you are going to drive me from you! You consent, then, to our becoming strangers to one another! What am I saying? You desire it; and although you

assure me that absence will not alter your sentiments, you do but urge my departure, in order to work more easily at their destruction. You speak already of replacing them by gratitude. Thus, the sentiment which an unknown would obtain from you for the most trivial service, or even your enemy for ceasing to injure you—this is what you offer to me! And you wish my heart to be satisfied with this! Interrogate your own; if your friends came one day to talk to you of their gratitude, would you not say to them with indignation: Depart from me, you are ingrates?

I come to a stop, and beseech your indulgence. Pardon the expression of a grief to which you have given birth; it will not detract from my complete submission. But I conjure you, in my turn, in the name of those sweet sentiments which you yourself invoke, do not refuse to hear me; and in pity, at least, for the mortal distress in which you have plunged me, do not defer the moment long. Adieu, Madame.

At the Château de..., 27th September, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE NINETY-SECOND

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

O MY friend! your letter has made my blood run cold for fright. Cécile.... O God! is it possible? Cécile no longer loves me. Yes, I see this direful truth, through the veil in which your friendship covers it. You wished to prepare me for the receipt of this mortal blow; I thank you for your pains; but can one impose on love? It is ever in advance of all that interests it: it does not hear of its fate, it divines it. I have no more doubt of mine: speak to me without concealment, you may do so, and I beg this of you. Inform me of everything; what gave rise to your suspicions, what has confirmed them? The least details are precious. Endeavour above all to recall her words. One word in place of another can change a whole sentence; the same word often bears two meanings.... You may have been deceived: alas, I seek to beguile myself still! What did she say to you? Does she make me any reproach? At least, does she not defend herself for her faults? I might have foreseen this change, from the difficulties which she raises lately about everything. Love is not acquainted with so many obstacles.

What course ought I to adopt? What do you counsel me? If I attempted to see her! Is that utterly impossible?

Absence is so cruel, so dismal . . . and she has rejected a means of seeing me! You do not tell me what it was; if there was in truth too much danger, she knows well that I am unwilling for her to run too much risk. But I also know your prudence; so to my misfortune I cannot but believe in it! What am I to do now? How write to her! If I let her see my suspicions, they will, perhaps, grieve her; and, if they are unjust, could she pardon me for having distressed her? To hide them from her is to deceive her, and I know not how to dissimulate with her.

Oh, if she could only know what I suffer, my pain would move her! I know her sensibility; she has an excellent heart, and I have a thousand proofs of her love. Too much timidity, some embarrassment: she is so young! And her mother treats her with such severity! I will write to her; I will restrain myself; I will only beg her to leave herself entirely in your hands. Even if she should still refuse, she can at least not take offence at my prayer; and perhaps she will consent.

To you, my friend, to you I make a thousand excuses, both for her and for myself. I assure you that she feels the value of your efforts, that she is grateful for them. It is timidity, not distrust. Be indulgent; it is the finest quality in friendship. Yours is very precious to me, and I know not how to acknowledge all that you do for me. Adieu, I will write at once.

I feel all my fears return: who would have told me that it should ever cost me an effort to write to her! Alas, only yesterday it was my sweetest pleasure! Adieu, my friend, continue your cares for me, and pity me mightily.

Paris, 27th September, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE NINETY-THIRD

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO CÉCILE VOLANGES

(Enclosed in the preceding)

I CANNOT conceal from you how grieved I have been to hear from Valmont of the scant confidence you continue to place in him. You are not ignorant that he is my friend, that he is the only person who can bring us together once more: I had thought that these titles would be sufficient with you; I see with pain that I have made a mistake. May I hope that at least you will inform me of your motives? Will you again find fresh difficulties which will prevent you? I cannot, however, without your help, penetrate the mystery of this conduct. I dare not suspect your love; doubtless you too would not venture to betray mine. Ah! Cécile! . . . .

Is it true then that you have rejected a means of seeing me? A *simple, convenient* and *sure* means? <sup>1</sup> And is it thus that you love me? An absence so short has indeed changed your sentiments. But why deceive me? Why tell me that you love me always, that you love me more? Your Mamma, in destroying your love, has she also destroyed your sincerity? If she has at least left

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<sup>1</sup> Danceny is ignorant of what this means was; he merely repeats Valmont's expression.

you some pity, you will not learn without sorrow the fearful tortures which you cause me. Ah! I should suffer less were I to die.

Tell me then, is your heart closed to me beyond recall? Have you utterly forgotten me? Thanks to your refusals, I know not either when you will hear my complaints, nor when you will reply to them. Valmont's friendship had assured our correspondence: but you, you have not wished it; you found it irksome; you preferred it to be infrequent. No, I shall believe no more in love, in good faith. Nay, whom can I believe, if my Cécile has deceived me?

Answer me then: is it true that you no longer love me? No, that is not possible; you are under an illusion; you belie your heart. A passing fear, a moment of discouragement, which love has soon caused to vanish: is it not true, my Cécile? Ah, doubtless; and I was wrong to accuse you. How happy I should be to be proved wrong! How I should love to make you tender excuses, to repair this moment of injustice with an eternity of love!

Cécile, Cécile, have pity on me! Consent to see me, employ for that every means! Look upon the effects of absence! Fears, suspicions, perhaps even coldness! A single look, a single word, and we shall be happy. But what! Can I still talk of happiness? Perhaps it is lost to me, lost for ever. Tortured by fear, cruelly buffeted between unjust suspicions and the most cruel truth, I cannot stay in any one thought; I only maintain existence to love you and to suffer. Ah, Cécile, you alone have the right to make it dear to me; and I expect, from the first word that you will utter, the return of happiness or the certainty of an eternal despair.

Paris, 27th September, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE NINETY-FOURTH

CÉCILE VOLANGES TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

I CAN gather nothing from your letter, except the pain it causes me. What has M. de Valmont written to you, then, and what can have led you to believe that I no longer loved you? That would be, perhaps, far happier for me, for I should certainly be less tormented; and it is very hard, when I love you as I do, to find that you always believe that I am wrong, and that, instead of consoling me, it is from you always that I receive the hurts which give me most pain. You believe I am deceiving you, and am telling you what is not the truth; it is a pretty notion you have of me! But, if I were to be as deceitful as you reproach me with being, what interest should I have? Assuredly, if I loved you no longer, I should only have to say so, and everybody would praise me; but unhappily it is stronger than I; and it must needs be for some one who feels no obligation to me for it at all!

What have I done, pray, to make you so vexed? I did not dare to take a key, because I was afraid that Mamma would perceive it, and that it would cause me more trouble, and you too on my account, and again because it seems to me a bad action. But it was only M. de Valmont who had spoken to me of it; I could not know whether you

wished it or no, since you knew nothing about it. Now I know that you desire it, do I refuse to take this key? I will take it to-morrow; and then we shall see what more you will have to say.

It is very well for M. de Valmont to be your friend; I think I love you at least as well as he can: and yet it is always he who is right, and I am always wrong. I assure you I am very angry. That is quite the same to you, because you know that I am quickly appeased: but, now that I shall have the key, I shall be able to see you when I want to; and I assure you that I shall not want to, when you act like this. I would rather have the grief that comes from myself, than that it came from you: you see what you are ready to cause.

If you liked, how we would love each other! And, at least, we should only know the troubles that are caused us by others! I assure you that, if I were mistress, you would never have any complaint to make against me: but if you do not believe me, we shall always be very unhappy, and it will not be my fault. I hope we shall soon be able to meet, and that then we shall have no further occasion to fret as at present.

If I had been able to foresee this, I would have taken the key at once; but, truly, I thought I was doing right. Do not be angry with me then, I beg you. Do not be sad any more, and love me always as well as I love you; then I shall be quite happy. Adieu, my dear love.

At the Château de . . . , 28th September, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE NINETY-FIFTH

CÉCILE VOLANGES TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

I BEG you, Monsieur, to be so kind as to return me the key which you gave me to put in the place of the other; since everybody wishes it, I must needs consent also.

I do not know why you wrote to M. Danceny that I no longer loved him: I do not believe I have ever given you reason to think so; and it has caused him a great deal of pain, and me too. I am quite aware that you are his friend; but that is not a reason for vexing him, nor me either. You would give me great pleasure by telling him to the contrary the next time you write to him, and that you are sure of it; for it is in you that he has the most confidence; and for me, when I have said a thing, and am not believed, I do not know what to do.

As for the key, you can be quite easy; I well remember all that you recommended me in your letter. However, if you still have it, and would like to give it me at the same time, I promise I will pay great attention to it. If it could be to-morrow as we go to dinner, I would give you the other key the day after to-morrow, at breakfast, and you could give it back to me in the same manner as the first. I should be very pleased if

it does not take long, because there will be less time for the danger of Mamma's seeing it.

Again, when once you have that key, you will be very kind to make use of it to take my letters also; and, in that way, M. Danceny will more often receive news of me. It is true that it will be much more convenient than it is at present; but at first it frightened me too much: I beg you to excuse me, and I hope you will none the less continue to be as obliging as in the past. I shall always be very grateful to you.

I have the honour to be, Monsieur, your most humble and obedient servant.

At the Château de . . . , 28th September, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE NINETY-SIXTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

I WILL wager that since your adventure, you have been daily expecting my compliments and praises; I doubt not even that you feel a trifle out of humour at my long silence: but what do you expect? I have always thought that, when one has naught but praise to give a woman, one may be at one's ease about her, and occupy one's self with other matters. However, I thank you on my own account and congratulate you on yours. I am even ready to make you completely happy by admitting that this time you have surpassed my expectation. After that, let us see if, on my side, I have come up to yours, at least in part.

It is not of Madame de Tourvel that I want to talk to you; her too laggard progress, I know, displeases you. You only love accomplished facts. Spun-out scenes weary you; for my part I had never tasted such pleasure as I find in these feigned delays. Yes, I love to see, to watch this prudent woman, engaged, without her perceiving it, on a course which admits of no return, whose rapid and dangerous declivity carries her on in spite of herself and forces her to follow me. Then, terrified at the danger she runs, she would fain halt, but cannot

hold herself in. Her skill and caution can indeed shorten her steps; yet they must inevitably succeed one another. Sometimes, not daring to behold the danger, she shuts her eyes and, letting herself go, abandons herself to my care. More often, a fresh alarm reanimates her efforts: in her mortal terror she would attempt once more to turn back; she wastes her strength in painfully overcoming a short distance; and soon a magic power replaces her nearer to that danger which she had vainly sought to fly. Then, having only me for guide and support, with no more thought to reproach me for an inevitable fall, she implores me to retard it. Fervent prayers, humble supplications, all that mortals in their terror offer to the divinity—it is I who receive them from her; and you would have me, deaf to her entreaties, and myself destroying the cult which she pays me, employ, to precipitate her, the power which she invokes for her support! Ah, leave me at least the time to observe those touching combats between love and virtue.

How then! Do you think that the same spectacle which makes you run eagerly to the theatre, which you applaud there with fury, is less engrossing in real life? Those sentiments of a pure and tender soul which dreads the happiness which it desires, and never ceases to defend itself even when it ceases to resist, you listen to with enthusiasm; should they not be priceless to him who has called them forth? That, however, is the delicious enjoyment which this heavenly woman offers me daily; and you reproach me for relishing its sweetness! Ah, the time will come only too soon when, degraded by her fall, she will be to me no more than an ordinary woman.

But, in talking of her to you, I forget that I did not



want to talk to you of her. I do not know what power constrains me, drags me back to her ceaselessly, even when I outrage her. Away with her dangerous idea; let me become myself again to treat a gayer subject. It concerns your pupil, who is now become my own, and I hope that here you will recognize me.

Some days ago, being better treated by my gentle Puritan, and in consequence less engrossed by her, I remarked that the little Volanges was, in fact, extremely pretty, and, that if there was folly in being in love with her, like Danceny, there was, perhaps, no less on my part in not seeking from her a distraction rendered necessary by my solitude. It seemed to me just, moreover, to repay myself for the care I was giving her: I reminded myself as well that you had offered her to me, before Danceny had any pretensions; and I considered myself justified in claiming certain rights on a property which he only possessed because I had refused and relinquished it. The little person's pretty face, her fresh mouth, her infantile air, her very *gaucherie*, fortified these sage resolutions; I consequently resolved on action, and my enterprise has been crowned by success.

You must be already wondering by what means I have so soon supplanted the favoured lover; what form of seduction befits such youth and such inexperience. Spare yourself the trouble; I employed none at all. Whereas you, wielding skilfully the weapons of your sex, triumph by subtilty, I, rendering his imprescriptible rights to man, subjugated by authority. Sure of my prey if I could get within reach of it, I only required a ruse to approach her; and even that which I employed barely merits the name.





M<sup>re</sup> Gerard del.

Mauquelin sculp.

I profited by the first letter which I received from Danceny for his fair; and, after having let her know of it by the concerted signal, instead of employing my skill to get it into her hands, I used it to find a lack of means to do so: the impatience to which this gave rise I feigned to share; and, after having caused the ill, I pointed out the remedy.

The young person occupies a chamber one door of which opens into the corridor; but, naturally, the mother had taken away the key. It was merely a question of obtaining possession of this. Nothing more easy of execution; I only asked to have it at my disposal for two hours, and I answered for the procural of one similar to it. Then, correspondence, interviews, nocturnal *rendez-vous*—everything became easy and safe: however, would you believe it? The timid child took alarm and refused. Another man would have been in despair; for my part, I only saw there the occasion for a more piquant pleasure. I wrote to Danceny to complain of this refusal, and I did it so well that our blockhead had no peace until he had obtained from his timorous mistress, and even urged her, that she should grant my request and so surrender herself utterly to my discretion.

I was mighty pleased, I confess, at having thus changed the rôles, and induced the young man to do for me what he calculated I should do for him. This notion doubled, in my eyes, the value of the adventure: thus, as soon as I had the precious key, I hastened to make use of it; this was last night.

After assuring myself that all was quiet in the *château*, armed with my dark lantern, and in the costume, befitting the hour, which the circumstance demanded, I paid my

first visit to your pupil. I had caused all preparations to be made (and that by herself) to permit of a noiseless entrance. She was in her first sleep, the sleep of her age; so that I reached her bedside before she had awakened. At first I was tempted to go even further, and try to pass for a dream; but, fearing the effects of surprise and the noise which it entails, I preferred to awake the lovely sleeper with precautions, and did in fact succeed in preventing the cry which I feared.

After calming her first fears, as I had not come there for conversation, I risked a few liberties. Doubtless she has not been well taught at her convent to how many varied perils timid innocence is exposed, and all that it has to guard if it would not be surprised; for, devoting all her attention, all her strength, to defending herself from a kiss, which was only a feigned attack, she left all the rest without defence; who could fail to draw profit from it! I changed my tactics accordingly, and promptly took the position. Here we both alike had thought ourselves to be lost: the little girl, in a mighty scare, tried to cry out in good earnest; luckily her voice was drowned by tears. She had thrown herself upon the bell-rope; but my adroitness restrained her arm in time.

"What would you do," I asked her then; "ruin yourself utterly? Let anyone come: what does it matter to me? Whom will you persuade that I am not here with your consent? Who else but you can have furnished me with the means of entering? And this key, which I have obtained from you, which I could only obtain from you—will you undertake to explain its use?"

This short harangue calmed neither her grief nor her anger; but it brought about her submission. I know not



if I had the accents of eloquence; it is true, at any rate, that I had not its gestures. With one hand employed in force, the other in love, what orator could pretend to grace in such a situation? If you rightly imagine it, you will admit that at least it was favourable to the attack: but, as for me, I have no head at all; and, as you say, the most simple woman, a school-girl, can lead me like a child.

This one, whilst still in high dudgeon, felt that she must adopt some course, and enter into a compromise. As prayers found me inexorable, she had to resort to bargaining. You think I sold the important post dearly: no, I promised everything for a kiss. It is true that, the kiss once obtained, I did not keep my promise: but I had good reasons. Had we agreed whether it was to be taken or given? By dint of bargaining, we fell into an agreement over the second; and this one, it was said, was to be received. Then, guiding her timid arms round my body, and pressing her more amorously with one of mine, the soft kiss was effectually received; nay excellently, nay perfectly received: so much so, indeed, that love itself could have done no better. Such good-faith deserved a reward; thus I at once granted her request. My hand was withdrawn; but I know not by what chance I found myself in its place. You will suppose me then mighty eager, energetic, will you not? By no means. I have acquired a taste for delay, I have told you. Once sure of arriving, why take the journey with such haste? Seriously, I was mighty pleased to observe once more the power of opportunity, and I found it here devoid of all extraneous aid. It had love to fight against, however, and love sustained by modesty and shame, and above all, fortified by the temper which I had excited, and which had

much effect. It was opportunity alone; but it was there, always offered, always present, and love was absent.

To verify my observations, I was cunning enough to employ no more force than could be resisted. Only, if my charming enemy, abusing my good-nature, seemed inclined to escape me, I constrained her by that same fear whose happy effects I had just experienced. Well, well! without any other further trouble, the languishing fair, forgetful of her vows, began by yielding and ended by consenting: not that, after this first moment, there was not a return of mingled reproaches and tears; I am uncertain whether they were real or feigned: but, as ever happens, they ceased as soon as I busied myself in giving cause for them anew. Finally, from frailty to reproach, and reproach to frailty, we separated, well satisfied with one another, and equally agreed on the *rendez-vous* to-night.

I did not retire to my own room until the break of day, and I was exhausted with fatigue and sleepiness: however, I sacrificed both to my desire to be present at breakfast this morning; I have a passion for watching faces on the day after. You can have no idea of this one. There was an embarrassment in the attitude! a difficulty in the gait! eyes always lowered, and so big, and so heavy! The face so round was elongated! Nothing could have been more amusing. And, for the first time, her mother, alarmed at this extreme alteration, displayed a most tender interest in her! And the Présidente too, who was very busy about her! Ah, those attentions of hers are only lent; a day will come when she will need them herself, and that day is not far distant. Adieu, my lovely friend.

At the Château de . . . , 1st October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE NINETY-SEVENTH

CÉCILE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE MERTEUIL

OH, my God, Madame, I am in such distress! I am so unhappy! Who will console me in my trouble? Who will advise me in the embarrassment in which I am? That M. de Valmont . . . . and Danceny! No, the idea of Danceny fills me with despair . . . . How can I tell you? How can I relate it? I do not know what to do. However, my heart is full . . . . I must speak to some one, and you are the only one whom I can, whom I dare confide in. You have shown me so much kindness! But do not have any for me now, I am not worthy of it: what shall I say? I do not wish it. Everybody here has shown an interest in me to-day . . . . they have all increased my grief. I felt so much that I did not deserve it! Oh, scold me on the contrary; scold me well, for I am very guilty: but afterwards save me; if you have not the goodness to advise me, I shall die of grief.

Listen then . . . . my hand trembles, as you see, I can hardly write, I can feel my face is all on fire . . . . Oh, it is indeed the blush of shame. Ah well, I will endure it; it will be the first punishment for my fault. Yes, I will tell you all.

You must know then, that M. de Valmont, who has

hitherto always handed me M. Danceny's letters, suddenly found it was too difficult; he wanted to have a key to my chamber. I can truly assure you that I did not want this: but he went so far as to write to Danceny, and Danceny also wished it; and as for me, it gives me so much pain to refuse him anything, especially since my absence, which makes him so unhappy, that I ended by consenting. I never foresaw the misfortune which it would lead to.

Yesterday, M. de Valmont made use of this key to come into my room when I was asleep; I was so little prepared for this, that he frightened me very much when he awoke me: but as he spoke to me at once, I recognized his voice, and did not cry out; and then the idea came to me at first that he had come, perhaps, to bring me a letter from Danceny. It was very far from that. A moment afterwards, he tried to embrace me; and whilst I defended myself, as was natural, he contrived to do what I would not have suffered for the whole world.... but he would have a kiss first. It had to be done, for what was there to do? All the more, as I had tried to call out; but, in addition to my not being able, he was careful to tell me that, if anyone came, he would know how to put all the blame on me; and, indeed, it was very easy, because of the key. Then he still refused to retire. He wanted a second one; and this one, I do not know how it was, but it quite confused me; and afterwards, it was even worse than before. Oh! indeed this is dreadful. In short, after.... you will surely excuse me from telling the rest: but I am as unhappy as anyone can be.

What I reproach myself with the most, and of which I must nevertheless speak to you, is that I am afraid I did not resist as much as I might have. I do not know how it happened.

I certainly do not love M. de Valmont, quite the contrary; and there were moments when it was just as though I loved him . . . You can imagine that did not prevent me from always saying no to him: but I felt sure that I did not act as I spoke, and that was in spite of myself; and then again, I was mightily confused! If it is always as difficult as that to resist, one ought to be well accustomed to it! It is true that M. de Valmont has a way of saying things to which one does not know how to answer. At last, would you believe it, when he went away, it was as though I was sorry; and I was weak enough to consent to his returning this evening: that distresses me more even than all the rest.

Oh! in spite of it, I promise you truly that I will prevent him from coming. He had hardly gone away, before I felt how very wrong I had been in promising him. I wept too all the rest of the time. It is about Danceny, especially, that I am so grieved! Every time I thought of him, my tears flowed so fast that I was suffocated, and I did nothing but think of him. . . . and now again, you see the result; here is my paper all soaked. No, I shall never be consoled, were it only because of him . . . At last I was worn out, and yet I was not able to sleep one minute. And this morning, on rising, when I looked at myself in the mirror, I was frightened, so much had I changed.

Mamma perceived it as soon as she saw me, and asked me what was the matter. As for me, I started crying at once. I thought she was about to scold me, and, perhaps, that would have hurt me less: but on the contrary she spoke gently to me! Little did I deserve it. She told me not to grieve like that! She did not know the cause of my grief. I should make myself ill! There are moments



when I should like to be dead. I could not contain myself. I threw myself sobbing into her arms, and said to her, "Oh, Mamma, your daughter is very miserable!" Mamma could not keep herself from crying a little; and all this only increased my grief. Luckily she did not ask me why I was so unhappy, for I should not have known what to tell her.

I implore you, Madame, write to me as soon as you can, and tell me what I ought to do: for I have not the courage to think of anything, and I can only grieve. Will you be so kind as to send your letter through M. de Valmont; but, if you write to him at the same time, do not, I beg you, tell him that I have said anything.

I have the honour to be, Madame, always with great affection, your most humble and obedient servant . . .

I dare not sign this letter.

At the Château de . . . , 1st October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE NINETY-EIGHTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

It is but a few days ago, my charming friend, that you were asking me for consolation and advice: to-day, it is my turn; and I make you the same request which you made to me. I am indeed in real distress, and I fear that I have not taken the best means to remove the vexations from which I suffer.

It is my daughter who is the cause of my anxiety. Since my departure I had seen she was always sad and melancholy; but I was prepared for that, and had armed my heart with the severity I judged necessary. I hoped that absence, distraction, would soon destroy a love which I looked upon rather as a childish error than as a real passion. However, far from having recovered since our sojourn here, I notice that the child abandons herself more and more to a dangerous melancholy; and I am actually afraid that her health is suffering. Particularly during the last few days, it has visibly altered. Yesterday, above all, it struck me, and everybody here was genuinely alarmed.

What proves to me, besides, how keenly she is affected is that I see her prepared to overcome the shyness she has always shown with me. Yesterday morning, at the mere question I put to her, as to whether she were ill, she threw

herself into my arms, telling me that she was very miserable; and she cried till she sobbed. I cannot describe to you the pain it caused me; tears came to my eyes at once; and I had only the time to turn away, to prevent her from seeing them. Luckily I had sufficient prudence to put no questions to her, and she did not dare to tell me any more; but it is none the less clear that it is this unfortunate passion which is tormenting her.

What course am I to take, however, if it lasts? Am I to be the cause of my daughter's unhappiness? Shall I blame her for the most precious qualities of the soul, sensibility and constancy? Am I her mother only for that? And if I should stifle that so natural sentiment, which makes us desire the happiness of our children; if I should regard as a weakness what I hold, on the contrary, to be the most sacred of all duties; if I force her choice, shall I not have to answer for the disastrous consequences which may ensue? What a use to make of maternal authority, to give my daughter a choice between unhappiness and sin!

My friend, I shall not imitate what I have so often blamed. Doubtless, I have tried to make a choice for my daughter; I did, in that, but aid her with my experience; it was not a right which I exercised, but a duty which I fulfilled. I should betray one, on the contrary, were I to dispose of her to the neglect of an inclination, the birth of which I have not been able to prevent, and of which neither she nor I can judge the duration or the extent. No, I will never endure that she should marry one man that she may love another; and I would rather compromise my authority than her virtue.

I think, therefore, that I shall be taking the more prudent course in retracting the promise I have given

to M. de Gercourt. You have just heard my reasons for this; it seems to me they ought to outweigh my promises. I say more: in the state in which things are, to fulfil my engagement would really be to violate it. For, after all, if I owe it to my daughter not to betray her secret to M. de Gercourt, I owe it to him at least not to abuse the ignorance in which I keep him, and to do for him all that I believe he would do for himself, if he were informed. Shall I, on the contrary, betray him ignobly, when he relies on my faith, and, whilst he honours me by choosing me for his second mother, deceive him in the choice he wishes to make of the mother of his children? These reflexions, so true, and to me irrefutable, alarm me more than I can say.

With the misfortunes which they make me dread I compare my daughter happy with the bridegroom her heart has chosen, knowing her duties only from the sweetness which she finds in fulfilling them; my son-in-law equally contented and congratulating himself each day upon his choice; neither of them finding happiness save in the happiness of the other, and in that of co-operating to augment my own. Ought the hope of so sweet a future to be sacrificed to vain considerations? And what are those which restrain me? Only interested views. Pray, what advantage will my daughter gain from being born rich, if she is, none the less, to be the slave of fortune?

I agree that M. de Gercourt is a better match, perhaps, than I ought to hope for my daughter; I confess, indeed, that I was extremely flattered at the choice he made of her. But, after all, Danceny is of as good a family as his; he yields no whit to him in personal qualities; he

has over M. de Gercourt the advantage of loving and of being beloved: in truth, he is not rich; but has not my daughter enough for two? Ah, why ravish from her the sweet satisfaction of enriching him whom she loves!

Those marriages which one calculates instead of assorting, which one calls marriages of convenience, and which are in fact convenient in all save taste and character—are they not the most fertile source of those scandalous outbreaks which become every day more frequent? I prefer to delay; at least I shall have time to study my daughter, whom I do not know. I have, indeed, the courage to cause her a passing sorrow, if she is to gain, thereby, a more substantial happiness: but I have not the heart to risk abandoning her to eternal despair.

Those, my dear friend, are the ideas which torment me, and as to which I ask your advice. These serious topics contrast mightily with your amiable gaiety, and seem hardly fitting to your youth: but your reason has so far outgrown that! Your friendship, moreover, will assist your prudence; and I have no fear that either will refuse the maternal solicitude which invokes them.

Adieu, my charming friend; never doubt the sincerity of my sentiments.

At the Château de . . . , 2nd October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE NINETY-NINTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

A FEW more small incidents, my lovely friend; but scenes merely, no more actions. Arm yourself, therefore, with patience, assume a stock of it even: for while my *Présidente* advances so imperceptibly, your pupil retreats, which is worse still! Well, well! I have wit enough to amuse myself with these vexations. Truly, I am acclimatizing myself mighty well to my sojourn here; and I may say that I have not experienced a single moment of *ennui* in my old aunt's dreary *château*. In fact, do I not find here enjoyment, privation, uncertainty, and hope? What more has one upon a greater stage? Spectators? Ah, let me be, they will not be lacking! If they do not see me at work, I will show them my labour accomplished; they will only have to admire and applaud. Yes, they will applaud; for at last I can predict with certainty the moment of my austere Puritan's fall. I assisted this evening at the death struggle of virtue. Sweet frailty will now rule in its stead. I fix the time at a date no later than our next interview: but already I hear you crying out against vain-glory. To announce one's victory, to boast in advance! Prithee, calm yourself! To prove my modesty, I will begin with the story of my defeat.

In very truth, your pupil is a most ridiculous little person! She is, indeed, a child, whom one should treat as such, and whom one would favour by doing no more than putting her under penance! Would you believe that, after what passed between us, the day before yesterday, after the amicable manner in which we separated yesterday morning, when I sought to return in the evening, as she had agreed, I found her door bolted on the inside? What say you to that? Such childishness one sometimes meets with on the eve: but on the morrow! Is it not amusing?

I did not, however, laugh at it at first; I had never felt so strongly the imperiousness of my character. Assuredly, I was going to this *rendez-vous* without pleasure, and solely out of politeness. My own bed, of which I had great need, seemed to me, for the moment, preferable to anyone else's, and I had dragged myself from it with regret. No sooner, however, had I met with an obstacle than I burned to overcome it; I was humiliated, above all, that a child should have tricked me. I withdrew, then, in considerable ill-humour; and, with the intention of concerning myself no further with this silly child and her affairs, I had written her a note, on the spur of the moment, which I intended to give her to-day, and in which I accounted her at her just value. But night brings counsel, as they say; methought this morning that, having no choice of distractions here, I had better keep this one: I suppressed, therefore, the severe letter. Since reflecting upon it, I wonder that I can ever have entertained the idea of concluding an adventure before holding in my hands the wherewithal to ruin the heroine. Observe, however, whither a first impulse impels us! Happy, my

fair friend, is he who has trained himself, as you have, never to give way to one! In fine, I have postponed my vengeance; I have made this sacrifice to your intentions towards Gercourt.

Now that I am no longer angry, I see your pupil's conduct only in a ridiculous light. In fact, I should be glad to know what she hopes to gain thereby! As for myself, I am at a loss: if it be only to defend herself, you must admit that she is somewhat late in starting. Some day she will have to tell me herself the key to this enigma. I have a great desire to know it. It may be, perhaps, only that she found herself fatigued? Frankly, that might well be possible: for, without a doubt, she is still ignorant that the darts of love, like the lance of Achilles, bear their own remedy for the ills they cause. But nay, by the little wry face she pulled all day, I would wager that there enters into it... repentance... there... something... like virtue... Virtue! It becomes her indeed to show it! Ah, let her leave it to the woman veritably born to it, to the only one who knows how to embellish it, who could make it lovable!... Pardon, my fair friend: but it is this very evening that there occurred between Madame de Tourvel and myself the scene of which I am about to send you an account, and I still feel some emotion at it. I have need to do myself violence, in order to distract me from the impression which it made upon me; 'tis even to aid me in this that I have sat down to write to you. Something must be pardoned to this first moment.

It is some days, already, since we are agreed, Madame de Tourvel and I, upon our sentiments; we only dispute about words. It was always, in truth, her *friendship* which

responded to my *love*; but this conventional language did not change things in substance; and, had we remained thus, I should have gone, perhaps, less quickly, but not less surely. Already even there was no more question of driving me away, as she had wished at first; and as for the interviews which we have daily, if I devote my cares to offering her the occasions, she devotes hers to seizing them.

As it is ordinarily when walking that our little *rendez-vous* occur, the shocking weather, which set in to-day, left me no hope; I was even really vexed by it; I did not foresee how much I was to gain from this *contretemps*.

Being unable to go out, they started play after rising from table; as I play little, and am no longer indispensable, I chose this time to go to my own room, with no other intention than to wait there until the game was likely to be over. I was on my way to rejoin the company, when I met the charming woman; she was about to enter her apartment, and, whether from imprudence or weakness, she said to me in her gentle voice, "Where are you going? There is nobody in the *salon*." I needed no more, as you may believe, to try and enter her room; I met with less resistance than I expected. It is true that I had taken the precaution to commence the conversation at the door, and to commence it indifferently; but hardly were we settled, than I brought back the real subject, and spoke of *my love for my friend*. Her first reply, though simple, seemed to me sufficiently expressive: "Oh, I pray you," said she, "do not let us speak of that here;" and she trembled. Poor woman! She sees she is lost.

However, she was wrong to be afraid. For some time past, assured of success some day or other, and seeing that







*M<sup>le</sup> Gerard del.*

*Baguoy sculp.*

she was spending so much strength in useless struggles, I had resolved to husband my own, and to wait, without further effort, until she should surrender from lassitude. You are quite aware that here I require a complete triumph, and that I wish to owe nothing to opportunity. It was, indeed, owing to this preconceived plan, and in order to be pressing without engaging myself too far, that I came back to this word love, so obstinately declined: sure that my ardour was sufficiently believed in, I tried a tone more tender. Her refusal no longer put me out, it pained me: did not my sensitive friend owe me some consolation?

As she consoled me, withal, one hand lingered in my own, the lovely form leaned upon my arm, and we were drawn extremely near. You have surely remarked, in such a situation, how, in proportion to the weakening of the defence, entreaties and refusals pass at closer quarters; how the head is averted and the gaze cast down; whilst remarks, always uttered in a weak voice, become rare and intermittent. These precious symptoms announce, in no equivocal manner, the soul's consent: but it has rarely yet extended to the senses; I even hold that it is always dangerous to attempt just then any too marked assault; because, this state of self-abandonment being never without a very sweet pleasure, one knows not how to dispel it, without giving rise to a humour which is invariably in the favour of the defence.

But, in the present case, prudence was all the more necessary to me in that I had, above all, to dread the alarm which this forgetfulness of herself could not fail to induce in my gentle dreamer. Thus, this avowal which I demanded, I did not even require that it should be pro-

nounced; a glance would suffice; only one glance, and I was happy.

My lovely friend, her fine eyes were, in fact, raised to mine; her celestial mouth even uttered, "Well yes, I..." But on a sudden her gaze was withdrawn, her voice failed, and this adorable woman fell into my arms. Hardly had I had time to receive her, when, extricating herself with convulsive force, her eyes wild, her hands raised to Heaven... "God... O my God, save me!" she cried; and at once, swifter than lightning, she was on her knees, ten paces from me. I could hear her ready to suffocate. I advanced to her assistance; but, seizing one of my hands, which she bedewed with tears, sometimes even embracing my knees: "Yes, it shall be you," she said, "it shall be you who will save me! You do not wish my death, leave me; save me; leave me; in the name of God, leave me!" And these inconsequent utterances barely escaped through her redoubled sobs. Meanwhile, she held me with a strength which did not permit me to withdraw: then, collecting my own, I raised her in my arms. At the same instant, her tears ceased; she said no more: all her limbs stiffened, and violent convulsions succeeded to this storm.

I was, I confess, deeply moved, and I believe I should have consented to her request, had not circumstances compelled me to do so. The fact remains that, after rendering her some assistance, I left her as she prayed me, and I congratulate myself on this. I have already almost received the reward.

I expected that, as on the day of my first declaration, she would not appear that evening. But, towards eight o'clock, she came down to the *salon*, and only informed

the company that she had been greatly indisposed. Her face was dejected, her voice feeble, her attitude constrained; but her gaze was soft, and was often fixed upon me. Her refusal to play having even compelled me to take her place, she took up hers at my side. During supper, she remained alone in the *salon* when we returned; methought I saw that she had wept: to make certain, I told her that I feared she still felt the effects of her indisposition, to which she answered me obligingly, "The complaint does not go as quickly as it comes!" Finally, when we retired, I gave her my hand; and, at the door of her apartment, she pressed mine with vigour. 'Tis true, this movement seemed to me to have something involuntary; but so much the better; it is a proof the more of my empire.

I would wager that at present she is enchanted to have reached this stage; the cost is paid; there is nothing left but to enjoy. Perhaps, whilst I am writing to you, she is already occupied with this soft thought! And even if she is employed, on the contrary, on a fresh project of defence, do we not know well what becomes of all such plans? I ask you then, can it go further than our next interview? I quite expect, by the way, that there will be some ceremony about the surrender; very good! But, once the first step taken, do these austere prudes ever know where to stop? Their love is a veritable explosion; resistance lends it greater force. My shy Puritan would run after me, if I ceased to run after her.

In short, my lovely friend, I shall on an early day be with you, to claim fulfilment of your word. You have not forgotten, doubtless, what you promised me after success: that infidelity to your Chevalier? Are you ready? For

myself, I desire it as much as if we had never known each other. For the rest, to know you is perhaps a reason for desiring it more:

*"Je suis juste, et ne suis point galant."* <sup>1</sup>

Moreover it shall be the first infidelity I will make to my serious conquest, and I promise you to profit by the first pretext to be absent for four-and-twenty hours from her. It shall be her punishment for keeping me so long away from you. Do you know that this adventure has occupied me for more than two months? Yes, two months and three days; 'tis true that I include to-morrow, since it will not be truly consummated till then. That reminds me that Madame de B\*\*\* held out for three whole months. I am most pleased to see that frank coquetry possesses more power of resistance than austere virtue.

Adieu, my lovely friend; I must leave you, for it is mighty late. This letter has led me on further than I had intended; but, as I am sending to Paris to-morrow, I was fain to profit by it to let you participate one day sooner in the joy of your friend.

At the Château de . . . , 2nd October, 17\*\*,  
in the evening.

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<sup>1</sup> Voltaire: *Nanine*.



## LETTER THE HUNDREDTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

My friend, I am tricked, betrayed, lost, I am in despair; Madame de Tourvel has gone. She has gone, and I did not know it! And I was not there to oppose departure, to reproach her with her unworthy treachery! Ah, do not think I would have let her leave; she would have stayed; yes, she would have stayed, if I had had to employ violence! But think! in credulous security, I slept tranquilly; I slept, and the thunderbolt has fallen upon me. No, I do not understand this departure at all; I must abandon all hope of understanding women.

When I recall the events of yesterday! What do I say? Even of yesterday night! That glance so sweet, that voice so tender, and that pressure of the hand! And all the time, she was planning flight from me! O women, women! After this, complain that you are deceived! Yes, any perfidy that one employs is a theft from your store.

What pleasure I shall take in avenging myself! I shall find her again, this perfidious woman; I shall resume my empire over her. If love sufficed to procure me the means of that, what will it not do when assisted by vengeance? I shall see her again at my knees, trembling and bathed in tears; and I—I shall be pitiless.

What does she at present? What does she think? Perhaps she applauds herself for having deceived me; and, faithful to the tastes of her sex, this pleasure seems to her the sweetest. What the so greatly vaunted virtue could not obtain the spirit of ruse has brought about without an effort. Madman that I was, I dreaded her virtue; it was her ill-faith that I had to fear.

And to be obliged to swallow my resentment! To dare show no more than a gentle sorrow, when I have a heart full of rage! To see myself reduced once more to be suppliant to a rebellious woman who has escaped from my sway! Ought I to be humiliated to such a degree? And by whom? By a timid woman, who was never practised in fight. What does it serve me to have established myself in her heart, to have scorched her with all the fires of love, to have carried the trouble of her senses to the verge of delirium, if, calm in her retreat, she can to-day plume herself more on her escape than I upon my victories? And should I suffer it? My friend, you do not believe it; you have no such humiliating idea of me!

But what fatality attaches me to this woman? Are there not a hundred others who desire my attentions? Will they not be eager to respond to them? Even if none were worth this one, does not the attraction of variety, the charm of fresh conquests, the pride of numbers offer pleasure sweet enough? Why run after that which eludes us, and neglect what is in our path? Ah, why? . . . I know not, but I feel it extremely.

There is no happiness or peace for me, save in the possession of this woman whom I hate and love with equal fury. I will only support my lot from the moment when I shall dispose of hers. Then, tranquil and satisfied,

I shall see her in her turn given over to the storms which I experience at this moment; I will excite a thousand others more! Hope and fear, security and distrust, all the ills devised by hate, all the good that love affords, I want them to fill her heart, to succeed one another at my will. That time shall come... But how many labours yet! How near I was yesterday! And how far away I see myself to-day! How to approach her again? I dare not take any measure; I feel that, before I adopt any course, I need greater calmness, and my blood leaps within my veins.

What enhances my torment is the calm with which everyone here replies to my questions upon this event, upon its cause, and all the extraordinary features it presents... No one knows anything, no one cares to know anything: they would hardly have spoken of it, had I allowed them to speak of anything else. Madame de Rosemonde, to whom I hastened this morning when I learned the news, answered me, with the indifference of her age, that it was the natural result of the indisposition which seized Madame de Tourvel yesterday; that she had been afraid of an illness, and had preferred to be at home: she thinks it quite simple; she would have done the same, she told me: as if there could be anything in common between the two! Between her, who has only death before her, and the other, who is the charm and torment of my life!

Madame de Volanges, whom I at first suspected of being an accomplice, seems only to be affected in that she was not consulted as to the step. I am delighted, I confess, that she has not had the pleasure of harming me. That proves again that she is not in this woman's confidence to the

extent I feared: that is always one enemy the less. How pleased she would be with herself, if she knew that it was I who was the cause of the flight! How swollen with pride, if it had been through her counsels! How her importance would have been enhanced! Great God, how I hate her! Oh, I will renew with her daughter, I will mould her to my fantasy: I think, therefore, I shall remain here for some time; at least, the little reflexion I have been able to make leads me to this course.

Do you not think, in fact, that, after so marked a step, my ingrate must dread my presence? If then the idea has come to her that I might follow her, she will not fail to close her door to me; and I wish as little to accustom her to that means as to endure the humiliation. I prefer, on the contrary, to announce to her that I shall remain here; I will even make entreaties for her return; and when she is persuaded of my absence, I will appear at her house: we shall see how she supports the interview. But I must postpone it, in order to enhance the effect, and I know not yet if I have the patience; twenty times to-day I have opened my mouth to call for my horses. However, I will command myself; I promise to await your reply here; I only beg you, my lovely friend, not to keep me waiting for it.

The thing which would thwart me the most would be not to know what is passing; but my *chasseur*, who is in Paris, has certain rights of access to the waiting-maid; he will be able to serve me. I am sending him instructions and money. I beg you to find it good that I join both to this letter, and also to be at the pains to send them to him by one of your people, with orders to place them in his own hands. I take this precaution because the rascal

is in the habit of failing to receive the letters I write to him, when they command him some task which irks him. And for the moment he does not seem to me so enamoured of his conquest as I could wish him to be.

Adieu, my lovely friend; if any happy idea comes to you, any means of accelerating my progress, inform me of it. I have, more than once, had experience of how useful your friendship can be to me; I experience it even at this moment: for I feel calmer since I have written to you; at least I am speaking to some one who understands me, and not to the automata with whom I vegetate since this morning. In truth, the further I go the more am I tempted to believe that you and I are the only people in the world who are of any consequence.

At the Château de . . . , 3rd October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIRST

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO AZOLAN, HIS *CHASSEUR*

(Enclosed in the preceding)

YOU must be addle-pated, indeed, to start hence this morning without knowing that Madame de Tourvel was leaving also; or, if you knew, not to come and warn me. Of what use is it, pray, that you should spend my money in getting drunk with the valets; that you should pass the time which you ought to employ in my service in making yourself agreeable to the maids, if I am no better informed of what is passing? This, however, is what comes of your negligence! But I warn you, if a single instance occurs in this matter, it is the last you shall commit in my service.

I require you to keep me informed of all that happens with Madame de Tourvel: of her health; if she sleeps; if she is dull or gay; if she often goes abroad, and whom she frequents; if she receives company, and of whom it consists; how she passes her time; if she shows ill-humour with her women, particularly with the one she brought here with her; what she does when she is alone; if, when she reads, she reads uninterruptedly, or often puts her reading aside to dream; and alike, when she is writing. Remember also to become the friend of him who carries her letters to the post. Offer often to do

this commission for him in his stead; and if he accepts, only dispatch those which seem to you indifferent, and send me the others, above all those, if you come across any, addressed to Madame de Volanges. Make arrangements to be, for some time longer, the happy lover of your Julie. If she has another, as you believed, make her consent to a participation, and do not plume yourself on any ridiculous delicacy; you will be in the same case with many others who are worth more than you. If, however, your substitute should become too importunate; should you perceive, for instance, that he occupied Julie too much during the day, and that she was less often with her mistress, get rid of him by some means, or seek a quarrel with him: have no fear of the results, I will support you. Above all, do not quit that house. It is by assiduity that one sees all, and sees clear.

If chance even should cause one of the men to be dismissed, present yourself to seek his place, as being no longer attached to me. Say in that case that you left me to seek a quieter and more regular house. Endeavour, in short, to get yourself accepted. I shall none the less keep you in my service during this time: it will be as it was with the Duchesse de \*\*\*; and in the end Madame de Tourvel will recompense you as well.

If you had skill and zeal enough, these instructions ought to suffice; but to make up for both, I send you money. The enclosed note authorizes you, as you will see, to receive twenty-five louis from my man of business; for I have no doubt that you are without a sou. You will employ what is necessary of this sum to induce Julie to establish a correspondence with me. The rest will serve to make the household drink. Have a care that this takes place

as often as possible in the lodge of the porter of the house, so that he may be glad to see you come. But do not forget that it is your services, and not your pleasures, that I wish to pay for.

Accustom Julie to observe and report everything, even what might appear to her trivial. It were better that she should write ten useless sentences than that she should omit one which was of interest; and often what appears indifferent is not so. As it is necessary that I should be informed at once, if anything were to happen which should seem to you to deserve attention, immediately on receipt of this letter you will send Philippe on the message-horse to establish himself at . . . ;<sup>1</sup> he will remain there until further orders; it will make a relay in case of need. For the current correspondence, the post will suffice.

Be careful not to lose this letter. Read it over every day, to assure yourself that you have forgotten nothing, as well as to make sure that you still have it. In short, do all that needs to be done, when one is honoured with my confidence. You know that, if I am satisfied with you, you will be so with me.

At the Château de . . . , 3rd October, 17\*\*.

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<sup>1</sup> A village half-way between Paris and the *château* of Madame de Rosemonde.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SECOND

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

YOU will be greatly astonished, Madame, to learn that I am leaving you so precipitately. This proceeding will appear to you very extraordinary : but your surprise will be redoubled, when you learn my reasons for it! Perhaps, you will find that, in confiding them to you, I do not sufficiently respect the tranquillity necessary to your age; that I even infringe the sentiments of veneration which are your due by so many titles? Ah! Madame, forgive me: but my heart is oppressed; it feels a need to pour out its griefs upon the bosom of a friend who is as kind as she is prudent: whom else, save you, could it choose? Look upon me as your child. Show me the kindness of a mother; I implore it. Perhaps my sentiments toward yourself give me some right to expect it.

Where has the time gone when, absorbed entirely in those laudable sentiments, I was ignorant of those which, afflicting my soul with the mortal sorrow I feel, deprive me of the strength to combat them at the same time that they impose upon me the duty? Ah, this fatal visit has been my ruin!... What shall I say to you, in fine? I love, yes, I love to distraction. Alas! that word which I write for the first time, that word so often entreated without

being ever obtained, I would pay with my life the sweet privilege of letting him who has inspired it hear it but a single time; and yet I must unceasingly withhold it. He will continue to doubt my feelings towards him; he will think he has cause to complain of them. I am indeed unhappy! Why is it not as easy for him to read in my heart as to reign there? Yes, I should suffer less, if he knew all that I suffer; but you yourself, to whom I say it, will still have but a feeble idea of it.

In a few moments, I am about to fly from him and cause him grief. Whilst he will still believe he is near me, I shall already be far away; at the hour when I was accustomed to see him daily, I shall be where he has never been, where I must not permit him to come. Already, all my preparations are complete, all is there beneath my eyes; I can let them rest on nothing which does not speak of this cruel separation. Everything is ready except myself...!

And the more my heart resists, the more does it prove to me the necessity of submission to it. Doubtless, I shall submit to it; it is better to die than to lead a life of guilt. I feel it already, I know it but too well; I have only saved my prudence, my virtue is gone. Must I confess it to you. What yet remains to me I owe to his generosity. Intoxicated with the pleasure of seeing him, of hearing him; with the sweetness of feeling him near me; with the still greater happiness of being able to make his own, I was powerless and without strength; hardly enough was left me to struggle: I had no longer enough to resist. Well! he saw my trouble and had pity on me. Could I do aught else than cherish him? I owe him far more than life.



Ah, if, by remaining near him, I had but to tremble for that, do not suppose I had ever consented to go away! What is life to me without him? Should I not be too happy to lose it? Condemned to be the cause of his eternal misery and my own; to dare neither to pity myself nor console him; to defend myself daily against him, and against myself; to devote my cares to causing him pain, when I would consecrate them all to his happiness; to live thus, is it not to die a thousand times? Yet that is what my fate must be. I will endure it, however; I will have the courage. O you, whom I chose for my mother, receive this vow.

Receive also that which I make, to hide from you none of my actions: receive it, I beseech you; I beg it of you as a succour of which I have need: thus, pledged to tell you all, I shall acquire the habit of believing myself always in your presence. Your virtue shall replace my own. Never, doubtless, shall I consent to come before you with a blush; and, restrained by this powerful check, whilst I shall cherish in you the indulgent friend, the confidant of my weakness, I shall also honour in you the guardian angel who will save me from shame.

Shame enough must I feel, in having to make you this request. Fatal effect of presumptuous confidence! Why did I not dread sooner this inclination which I felt springing up? Why did I flatter myself that I could master it or overcome it at my will? Insensate! How little I knew what love was! Ah, if I had fought against it with more care, perhaps it would have acquired less dominion; perhaps then this separation would not have been necessary; or, even if I had submitted to that sorrowful step, I need not have broken off entirely a

relation which it would have been sufficient to render less frequent! But to lose all at one stroke, and for ever! O my friend!... But what is this? Even in writing to you, shall I be led away to vent criminal wishes? Ah! away, away! and at least let these involuntary errors be expiated by my sacrifices.

Adieu, my venerable friend; love me as your daughter, adopt me for such; and be sure that, in spite of my weakness, I would rather die than render myself unworthy of your choice.

At the Château de . . . , 3rd October, 17\*\*,  
at one o'clock in the morning.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRD

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

I WAS more grieved at your departure, my fairest dear, than surprised at its cause; a long experience and the interest which you inspire in me had sufficed to enlighten me as to the state of your heart; and, if all must be told, there was nothing, or almost nothing, that your letter taught me. If it had been my only source of information, I should be still in ignorance of whom it was you loved; for, in speaking to me of *him* all the time, you did not even once write his name. I had no need of that; I am well aware who it is. But I remark it, because I remind myself that that is ever the style of love. I see that it is still the same as in past times.

I had hardly expected ever to be in the case to hark back to memories so far removed from me, and so alien to my age. Since yesterday, nevertheless, I have truly been much occupied with them, through the desire which I felt to find in them something which might be useful to you. But what can I do, except admire and pity you? I praise the wise course you have taken: but it alarms me, because I conclude from it that you judged it necessary; and, when one has gone so far, it is very difficult to remain always at a distance from him to whom our

heart is incessantly attracting us. However, do not lose courage. Nothing should be impossible to your noble soul; and, even if you should some day have the misfortune to succumb (which God forbid!), believe me, my fairest dear, reserve for yourself at least the consolation of having struggled with all your power. And then, what human prudence cannot effect, divine grace will, if it be so pleased. Perhaps you are on the eve of its succour; and your virtue, proved by these grievous struggles, will issue from them purer and more lustrous. Hope that you may receive to-morrow the strength which you lack to-day. Do not count upon this in order to repose upon it, but to encourage you to use all your own.

Whilst leaving to Providence the care of succouring you in a danger against which I can do nothing, I reserve to myself that of sustaining and consoling you, as far as within me lies. I shall not assuage your pains, but I will share them. It is by virtue of this that I will gladly receive your confidences. I feel that your heart must have need of unburdening itself. I open mine to you; age has not yet so chilled it that it is insensible to friendship. You will always find it ready to receive you. It will be a poor solace to your sorrow; but at least you will not weep alone: and when this unhappy love, obtaining too much power over you, compels you to speak of it, it is better that it should be with me than with *him*. Here am I talking like you; and I think that, between us, we shall succeed in avoiding his name: for the rest, we understand one another.

I know not whether I am doing right in telling you that he seemed keenly grieved at your departure; it would be wiser, perhaps, not to speak of it: but I have no love

for the prudence which grieves its friends. Yet I am forced to speak about it at no greater length. My weak sight and tremulous hands do not admit of long letters, when I have to write them myself.

Adieu then, my fairest dear; adieu, my amiable child: yes, I gladly adopt you for my daughter, and you have, indeed, all that is needed to make the pride and pleasure of a mother.

At the Château de . . . , 3rd October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FOURTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO MADAME DE VOLANGES

IN truth, my good and dear friend, I could hardly refrain from a movement of pride when I read your letter. What! you honour me with your entire confidence! You even deign to ask for my advice! Ah, I am happy indeed, if I deserve this favourable opinion on your part: if I do not owe it only to the prepossession of friendship. For the rest, whatever the motive may be, it is none the less precious to my heart; and to have obtained it is only one reason the more in my eyes why I should labour harder to deserve it. I am going then (but without pretending to give you a counsel) to tell you freely my fashion of thinking. I distrust myself, because it is different from yours: but when I have exposed my reasons to you, you will judge them; and if you condemn them, I subscribe to your judgment in advance. I shall at least show thus much wisdom, that I do not think myself wiser than you.

If, however, and in this single instance, my opinion should seem preferable, you must seek for the cause of this in the illusions of maternal love. Since this sentiment is a laudable one, it needs must have a place in you. Indeed, how very recognizable it is in the course which you are



tempted to take! It is thus that, if it sometimes happens to you to make a mistake, it never arises except through a choice of virtues.

Prudence, it seems to me, is the quality to be preferred, when one is disposing of another's fate; and, above all, where it is a question of fixing it by an indissoluble and sacred bond, such as that of marriage. 'Tis then that a mother, equally wise and tender, ought, as you say so well, *to aid her daughter with her experience*. Now, I ask you, what is she to do in order to succeed in this, if it be not to distinguish for her between what is pleasant and what is suitable?

Would it not, then, be to degrade the maternal authority, would it not be to annul it, if you were to subordinate it to a frivolous inclination, the illusory power of which is only felt by those who dread it, and disappears as soon as it is despised? For myself, I confess, I have never believed in these irresistible and engrossing passions, through which, it seems, we are agreed to pay general excuses for our disorders. I cannot conceive how a fancy which is born in a moment, and in a moment dies, can have more strength than the unalterable principles of honour, modesty and virtue; and I can no more understand why a woman who is false to them can be held justified by her pretended passion, than a thief would be by his passion for money, or an assassin by that for revenge.

Ah, who is there that can say that she has never had to struggle? But I have ever sought to persuade myself that, in order to resist, it sufficed to have the will; and thus far, at least, my experience has confirmed my opinion. What would virtue be without the duties which it imposes? Its worship lies in our sacrifices, its recompense in our hearts.

These truths cannot be denied except by those who have an interest in disregarding them, and who, already depraved, hope to have a moment's illusion by endeavouring to justify their bad conduct by bad reasons. But could one fear it from a shy and simple child; a child whom you have borne, and whose pure and modest education can but have fortified her happy nature? Yet it is to this fear, which I venture to call humiliating to your daughter, that you are ready to sacrifice the advantageous marriage which your prudence had contrived for her! I like Danceny greatly; and for a long time past, as you know, I have seen little of M. de Gercourt: but my friendship with the one and my indifference towards the other do not prevent me from feeling the enormous difference which exists between the two matches.

Their birth is equal, I admit; but one is without fortune, whilst that of the other is so great that, even without birth, it would have sufficed to obtain him everything. I quite agree that money does not make happiness, but it must be admitted, also, that it greatly facilitates it. Mademoiselle de Volanges is rich enough for two, as you say: however, an income of sixty thousand livres, which she will enjoy, is not over much when one bears the name of Danceny; when one must furnish and maintain a house which corresponds with it. We no longer live in the days of Madame de Sévigné. Luxury swallows up everything; we blame it, but we needs must imitate it, and in the end the superfluous stints us of the necessary.

As to the personal qualities which you count for much, and with good reason, M. de Gercourt is, assuredly, irreproachable on that score; and, as for him, his proof is over. I like to think, and, in fact, I do think, that

Danceny is no whit his inferior: but are we as sure of that? It is true that thus far he has seemed exempt from the faults of his age, and that, in spite of the tone of the day, he shows a taste for good company which makes one augur favourably for him: but who knows whether this apparent virtue be not due to the mediocrity of his fortune? Putting aside the fear of being a cheat or a drunkard, one needs money to be a gambler or a libertine, and one may yet love the faults the excesses of which one dreads. In short, he would not be the first in a thousand to frequent good company solely because he lacked the means of doing otherwise.

I do not say (God forbid!) that I believe all this of him; but it would be always a risk to run; and what reproaches would you not have to make yourself, if the event were not happy! How would you answer your daughter, if she were to say to you, "Mother, I was young and without experience; I was seduced even by an error pardonable at my age: but Heaven, which had foreseen my weakness, had granted me a wise mother, to remedy it and protect me from it. Why, then, forgetful of your prudence, did you consent to my unhappiness? Was it for me to choose a husband, when I knew nothing of the marriage-state? If I had wished to do so, was it not your duty to oppose me? But I never had this mad desire. Determined to obey you, I awaited your choice with respectful resignation; I never failed in the submission which I owed to you, and yet I bear to-day the penalty which is only the rebellious children's due. Ah! your weakness has been my ruin!..."

Perhaps, her respect would stifle these complaints: but maternal love would divine them; and the tears of your

daughter, though hidden, would none the less drip upon your heart. Where then will you look for consolation? Will it be to that mad love against which you should have armed her, and by which, on the contrary, you would have yourself to be seduced?

I know not, my dear friend, whether I have too strong a prejudice against this passion: but I deem it redoubtable even in marriage. It is not that I disapprove of the growth of a soft and virtuous sentiment to embellish the marriage bond, and to sweeten, in some sort, the duties which it imposes: but it is not to that passion, that it belongs to form it; it is not for the illusion of a moment to settle the choice of our life. In fact, in order to choose, one must compare; and how can that be done, when one is occupied by a single object, when even that object one cannot know, plunged as one is in intoxication and blindness?

I have, as you may well believe, come across many women afflicted with this dangerous ill; of some of them I have received the confidences. To hear them, there is not one of them whose lover is not a perfect being: but these chimerical perfections exist only in their imaginations. Their feverish heads dream only of virtues and accomplishments; they adorn with them, at their pleasure, the object whom they prefer: it is the drapery of a god, often worn by an abject model; but whatever it may be, hardly have they clothed it than, the dupes of their own handiwork, they prostrate themselves to adore it.

Either your daughter does not love Danceny, or else she is under this same illusion; if their love is reciprocal, it is common to both. Thus your reason for uniting them for ever resolves itself into the certainty that they do not, and cannot, know each other. But, you will ask, do M.

de Gercourt and my daughter know each other any better? No, doubtless; but at least they are simply ignorant, they are under no delusion. What happens in such a case between two married persons whom I assume to be virtuous? Each of them studies the other, looks face to face at the other, seeks and soon discovers what tastes and wishes he must give up for the common tranquillity. These slight sacrifices are not irksome, because they are reciprocal, and have been foreseen: soon they give birth to mutual kindness; and habit, which fortifies all inclinations which it does not destroy, brings about, little by little, that sweet friendship, that tender confidence, which, joined to esteem, form, so it seems to me, the true and solid happiness of marriage.

The illusions of love may be sweeter; but who does not know that they are less durable? And what dangers are not brought about by the moment which destroys them? It is then that the least faults appear shocking and unendurable, by the contrast which they form with the idea of perfection which had seduced us. Each one of the couple believes, however, that only the other has changed, and that he has always the same value as that which, in a mistaken moment, had been attributed to him. The charm which he no longer experiences he is astonished at no longer producing; he is humiliated at this: wounded vanity embitters the mind, augments injuries, causes ill-humour, begets hate; and frivolous pleasures are paid for finally by long misery.

Such, my dear friend, is my manner of thinking upon the subject which occupies us; I do not defend it, I simply expound it; 'tis for you to decide. But if you persist in your opinion, I beg you to make me acquainted with the

reasons which have outweighed my own: I shall be glad indeed to gather light from you, and, above all, to be reassured as to the fate of your amiable child, whose happiness I ardently desire, both through my friendship for her and through that which unites me to you for life.

Paris, 4th October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO CÉCILE VOLANGES

WELL, well, little one! So here you are quite vexed, quite ashamed. And that M. de Valmont is a wicked man, is he not? How now! He dares to treat you as the woman he would love the best! He teaches you what you are dying with desire to know! In truth, these proceedings are unpardonable. And you, on your side, you wished to keep your virtue for your lover (who does not abuse it): you cherish only the pains of love and not its pleasures! Nothing could be better, and you will figure marvellous well in a romance. Passion, misfortune, above all, virtue: what a heap of fine things! In the midst of this brilliant pageant, one feels *ennui* sometimes, it is true, but one pays it back.

See the poor child, then, how much she is to be pitied! Her eyes looked worn, the day after? What will you say, pray, when it is your lover's that look thus? Nay, my sweet angel, you will not always have them so; all men are not Valmonts. And then, not to dare to raise those eyes! Oh, in truth, you were right there; everybody would have read in them your adventure. Believe me, however, if it were so, our women and even our damsels would have a far more modest gaze.

In spite of the praise I am forced to give you, as you see, I must, however, admit that you failed in your *chef-d'œuvre*; which was to have told everything to your Mamma. You had started so well! You had, already, thrown yourself into her arms, you sobbed, she also wept: what a pathetic scene! And what a pity not to have completed it! Your tender mother, quite ravished with delight, and to assist your virtue, would have shut you up in a convent for the rest of your life; and there you could have loved Danceny as much as you wished, without rivals and without sin: you could have broken your heart at your ease; and Valmont, assuredly, would not have come to trouble your grief with vexatious pleasures.

Seriously, at past fifteen can one be so utterly a child as you are? You are right, indeed, to say that you do not deserve my kindness. Yet I would be your friend: you have need of one, perhaps, with the mother you possess and the husband whom she would give you! But if you do not form yourself more, what would you have one do with you? What can one hope for, when that which generally excites intelligence in girls seems, on the contrary, to deprive you of it?

If you could bring yourself to reason for a moment, you would soon find that you ought to congratulate yourself, instead of complaining. But you are shame-faced, and that disturbs you! Well, calm yourself; the shame caused by love is like its pain; it is only experienced once. Indeed one can feign it afterwards, but one no longer feels it. The pleasure, however, remains, and that is surely something. I think even that I gathered the fact, from your little chattering letter, that you were inclined to count it for much. Come now, a little honesty.

That trouble which prevented you *from acting as you spoke*, which made you find it *so difficult to resist*, which made you feel *as though you were sorry* when Valmont went away, was it really shame which caused it, or was it pleasure? and *his way of saying things to which one does not know how to answer*, may that not have arisen from his *way of acting*? Ah, little girl, you are fibbing, and you are fibbing to your friend. That is not right. But let us leave that.

What would be a pleasure to anybody, and could be nothing else, becomes in your position a veritable happiness. In fact, placed as you are between a mother whose love is necessary to you, and a lover by whom you desire to be loved always, do you not see that the only means of obtaining these opposite ends is to occupy yourself with a third party? Distracted by this new adventure, whilst, in your Mamma's eyes, you will have the air of sacrificing to your submission an inclination which displeases her, in the eyes of your lover you will acquire the honour of a fine defence. Whilst assuring him incessantly of your love, you will not grant him the last proofs of it. Such refusals, so little painful to you in the case in which you will be, he will not fail to attribute to your virtue; he will complain of them, perhaps, but he will love you more for them; and to obtain the double merit of having sacrificed love in the eyes of one, of resisting it in those of the other, will cost you nothing more than to taste its pleasures. Oh, how many women have lost their reputation which they would have carefully preserved, had they been able to retain it by similar means!

Does not the course which I propose to you seem to you the most reasonable, as it is the most pleasant?

Do you know what you have gained from that which you have adopted? Only that your Mamma has attributed your increased melancholy to an increase of love, that she is incensed at it, and that, to punish you, she only waits for additional proof. She has just written to me; she will make every attempt to extract the admission from you. She will go so far, she told me, as to propose Danceny to you, as a husband, and that, in order to induce you to speak. And if, letting yourself be beguiled by this deceitful tenderness, you answered as your heart bade you, soon, confined for a long time, perhaps for ever, you would weep for your blind credulity at your leisure.

This ruse which she wishes to employ against you you must combat with another. Begin then, by seeming less melancholy, to lead her to believe that you think less of Danceny. She will allow herself to be the more easily persuaded in that this is the ordinary effect of absence; and she will be the better disposed to you for it, since she will find in it an opportunity for applauding her own prudence which suggested this means to her. But if, some doubt still remaining, she were, nevertheless, to persist in proving you, and were to speak to you of marriage, fall back, as a well-bred daughter, upon perfect submission. As a matter of fact, what do you risk? As far as husbands are concerned, one is worth no more than another; and the most uncompromising is always less troublesome than a mother.

Once more satisfied with you, your mother will at last marry you; and then, less hampered in your movements, you will be able, at your choice, to quit Valmont and take Danceny, or even to keep them both. For,

mark this, your Danceny is charming; but he is one of those men whom one has when one wills and as long as one wills: one can be at one's ease, then, with him. It is not the same with Valmont: it is difficult to keep him, and dangerous to leave him. One must employ with him much tact, or, if one has not that, much docility. On the other hand, if you could succeed in attaching him to you as a friend, what a piece of fortune that would be! He would set you, at once, in the first rank of our women of fashion. It is in this way that one acquires consideration in the world, and not by dint of tears and blushes, as when your nuns made you take your dinner on your knees.

If you are wise then, you will endeavour to be reconciled with Valmont, who must be mighty wroth with you; and, as one should know how to repair one's follies, do not fear to make a few advances to him; besides, you will soon learn that, if men make us the first ones, we are almost always obliged to make the second. You have a pretext for them: for you must not keep this letter; and I require you to hand it to Valmont as soon as you have read it. Do not forget, however, to seal it beforehand. First, in order to secure for yourself the merit of the step you are taking with regard to him, and to prevent your having the air of being advised to it; and, secondly, because there is no one in the world, save yourself, of whom I am sufficiently the friend to speak to as I do to you.

Adieu, sweet angel; follow my advice, and you shall tell me if you feel the better for it.

P.S. By the way, I was forgetting . . . one word more. Look to it that you cultivate your style more. You write always like a child. I quite see whence it arises; it is

because you say all that you think, and no whit of what you do not think. That may pass between you and me, who have nothing to hide from one another: but with everybody! With your lover above all! You would always have the air of a little fool. You must remember that, when you write to anyone, it is for him and not for yourself: you must, therefore, think less of telling him what you think than what will give him most pleasure.

Adieu, sweetheart: I kiss you instead of scolding you, in the hope that you will become more reasonable.

Paris, 4th October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

AMAZING, Vicomte, and this time I love you furiously! For the rest, after the first of your two letters, I could expect the second: thus it did not astonish me; and whilst, proud already of your success to come, you were soliciting its reward, and asking me if I were ready, I saw clearly that I had no such need for haste. Yes, upon my honour; reading the beautiful account of that tender scene, which had *moved you so deeply*, observing your restraint, worthy of the fairest days of our chivalry, I said to myself a score of times: The affair has failed!

But that is because it could not befall otherwise. What do you expect a poor woman to do who surrenders, and is not taken? My faith, in such a case one must at least save one's honour; and that is what your Présidente does. I know well that, for myself, who can perceive that the step she has taken is really not without some effect, I propose to make use of it myself on the first rather serious occasion which presents itself: but I promise you that, if he for whom I go to that trouble profits no better than you from it, he may assuredly renounce me for ever.

Here you are then, reduced, brought to impotence! And that between two women, one of whom had already

crossed the Rubicon, and the other was asking nothing better than to do so. Well, well, you will think that I am boasting, and say that it is easy to prophesy after the event; but I can swear to you that I expected as much. It is because you have not really the genius of your estate; you know nothing except what you have learned, and you invent nothing. Thus, as soon as circumstances no longer lend themselves to your accustomed formulas, and you are compelled to leave the beaten road, you pull up short like a school-boy. In short, a piece of childishness on the one side, a return of prudery on the other, are enough to disconcert you, because you do not meet with them every day; and you know not how either to prevent or remedy them. Ah, Vicomte, Vicomte, you teach me not to judge men by their successes; and soon we shall have to say of you: On such and such a day, he was brave! And when you have committed follies after follies, you come running to me! It seems that I have nothing else to do but to repair them. It is true, that there would be work enough there.

Whatever may be the state of these two adventures, one was undertaken against my will, and I will not meddle in it; for the other, as you have brought some complaisance for me to bear upon it, I make it my business. The letter which I enclose, which you will read first and then give to the little Volanges, is more than sufficient to bring her back to you: but, I beg you, give some attention to this child, and let us make her, in concert, the despair of her mother and of Gercourt. You need not fear to increase the doses. I see clearly that the little person will not take alarm; and, our views upon her once fulfilled, she may become what she will.

I am entirely without interest on her account. I had had some desire to make of her, at least, a subaltern in intrigue, and to take her to play *understudies* to me: but I see that she has not the stuff in her; she has a foolish ingenuousness, which has not even yielded to the specific you have employed, though it be one which rarely fails; and it is, according to me, the most dangerous disease a woman can have. It denotes, above all, a weakness of character almost always incurable, and opposed to everything; in such wise that, whilst we busied ourselves in forming this little girl for intrigue, we should have made nothing of her but a facile woman. Now I know nothing so insipid as that idiotic facility, which surrenders without knowing how or why, solely because it is attacked and knows not how to resist. This kind of woman is absolutely nothing than a pleasure machine.

You will tell me that this is all there is to do, and that it is enough for our plans. Well and good! But do not let us forget that, with that kind of machine, everybody soon attains to a knowledge of the springs and motors; in order therefore to employ this one without danger, one must hasten, stop at the right moment and break it afterwards. In truth, there will be no lack of means to disembarass ourselves of it, and Gercourt, at any rate, will shut it up securely, when it is our pleasure. Indeed, when he can no longer doubt of his dishonour, when it is quite public and notorious, what will it matter to us if he avenges, provided that he do not console, himself? What I say of the husband, you doubtless think of the mother; thus the affair is settled.

The course I deem the better, and upon which I have decided, has induced me to conduct the little person

somewhat rapidly, as you will see by my letter; it also renders it most important that nothing should be left in her hands which might compromise us, and I beg you to pay attention to this. This precaution once taken, I charge myself with the moral teaching; the rest concerns you. If, however, we see in the issue that ingenuousness is cured, we have always time to change our project. We should, in any case, have had, one day or other, to occupy ourselves with what we are about to do: in no case will our pains be wasted.

Do you know that mine risked being so, and that the Gercourt's star came near to carrying the day over my prudence? Did not Madame de Volanges show a moment of maternal weakness? Did she not want to marry her daughter to Danceny? It was that which was presaged by that more tender interest which you remarked "*the day after.*" It is you again who would have been the cause of this noble masterpiece! Luckily, the tender mother wrote to me, and I hope that my reply will disillusion her. I talk so much virtue in it, and above all I flatter her so, that she is bound to think I am right.

I am sorry that I have not found time to make a copy of my letter, to edify you with the austerity of my morals. You would see how I despise women who are so depraved as to take a lover! 'Tis so convenient to be a rigorist in conversation! It does no hurt, except to others, and in no way impedes ourselves. . . . And then, I am quite aware that the good lady had her little peccadillos like any other in her young days, and I was not sorry to humiliate her, at least before her conscience; it consoled me a little for the praises I gave her against my own. It was similarly that, in the

same letter, the idea of harming Gercourt gave me the courage to speak well of him.

Adieu, Vicomte; I thoroughly approve the course you adopt in remaining some time where you are. I have no means of spurring on your progress: but I invite you to distract yourself with our common pupil. As for myself, in spite of your obliging summons, you see well that you have still to wait, and you will doubtless admit that it is not my fault.

Paris, 3rd October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTH

AZOLAN TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

MONSIEUR,

Conformably to your orders, I went, immediately on the receipt of your letter, to M. Bertrand, who gave me the twenty-five louis, as you had ordered him. I asked him for two more for Philippe, whom I had told to set off immediately, as Monsieur had commanded me, and who had no money; but your man of business would not do so, saying that he had no order from you for that. I was obliged therefore to give him these myself, and Monsieur will hold me acquitted of them, if it be his good pleasure.

Philippe set off yesterday evening. I strongly impressed upon him not to leave the inn, so that we might be certain of finding him if we had need of him.

I went immediately afterwards to Madame la Présidente's to see Mademoiselle Julie; but she was gone out, and I could only speak with La Fleur, from whom I could learn nothing, as, since his arrival, he has only been to the house at meal-times. It is the second lackey who does all the service, and Monsieur knows that I was not acquainted with him. But I began to-day.

I returned this morning to Mademoiselle Julie, and she seemed delighted to see me. I questioned her upon the



cause of her mistress's return; but she told me that she knew naught of it; and I believe she told the truth. I reproached her with having failed to inform me of her departure, and she assured me that she had not known it till the night before, when putting Madame to bed; so that she spent all the night in packing, and the poor wench had not two hours' sleep. She did not leave her mistress's chamber that night until past one, and left her just as she was sitting down to write.

In the morning, Madame de Tourvel, before leaving, handed a letter to the porter of the *château*. Mademoiselle Julie does not know for whom: she says that it was, perhaps, for Monsieur; but Monsieur does not speak of it.

During the whole journey, Madame had a great hood over her face; by reason of this one could not see her: but Mademoiselle Julie feels assured that she often wept. She did not speak one word, and she would not halt at . . . ,<sup>1</sup> as she had done on her coming, which was none too pleasing to Mademoiselle Julie, who had not breakfasted. But, as I said to her, the masters are the masters.

On arriving, Madame went to bed: but she only remained there two hours. On rising, she summoned her Swiss, and gave him orders to admit nobody. She made no toilette at all. She sat down to table for dinner, but only took a little soup, and went away at once. Her coffee was brought to her room, and Mademoiselle Julie entered at the same time. She found her mistress arranging papers in her writing-desk, and she saw that they were letters. I would wager that they were those from Monsieur; and of the three which came to her in the afternoon, there was one

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<sup>1</sup> The afore-mentioned village, half-way on the road.

which she had still before her all the evening. I am quite certain that it is also one from Monsieur. But why then did she leave like this? That is what astounds me. For that matter, Monsieur is sure to know, and it is no business of mine.

Madame la Présidente went in the afternoon to the library, and took thence two books which she carried to her *boudoir*: but Mademoiselle Julie is certain that she did not read a quarter of hour in them during the whole day, and that she does nothing but read this letter and dream, with her head resting on her hand. As I thought that Monsieur would be pleased to know what these books are, and as Mademoiselle Julie could not say, I obtained admission to the library under the pretence of wishing to see it. There are only two books missing: one is the second volume of the *Pensées chrétiennes*, and the other, the first of a book entitled *Clarissa*. I write the name as it is written: Monsieur will, perhaps, know what it is.

Yesterday evening, Madame did not sup; she only took some tea.

She rang at an early hour this morning; asked at once for her horses, and went, before nine o'clock, to the Bernardines, where she heard mass. She wished to confess; but her confessor was away, and he will not return for a week or ten days. I thought it well to inform Monsieur of this.

She returned immediately, breakfasted, and then began to write, and she remained thus for nearly an hour. I soon found occasion to do what Monsieur desired the most; for it was I who carried the letters to the post. There was none for Madame de Volanges: but I send one to Monsieur which was for M. le Président: it seemed

to me that this should be the most interesting. There was one also for Madame de Rosemonde; but I imagined that Monsieur could always see that when he wished, and I let it go. For the rest, Monsieur is sure to know everything, since Madame la Présidente has written to him also. I shall in the future obtain all those which Monsieur desires; for it is Mademoiselle Julie, almost every day, who gives them to the servants, and she has assured me that, out of friendship for me, and for Monsieur too, she will gladly do what I want.

She did not even want the money which I offered her: but I feel sure that Monsieur would like to make her some little present; and if this is his wish, and he is willing to charge me with it, I shall easily find out what will give her pleasure.

I hope that Monsieur will not think that I have shown any negligence in his service, and I have set my heart on justifying myself against the reproaches he makes me. If I did not know of Madame la Présidente's departure, it was, on the contrary, my zeal in Monsieur's service which was the cause, since it was that which made me start at three o'clock in the morning; which was the reason that I did not see Mademoiselle Julie the night before, as usual, having gone to Tournebride to sleep, so that I might not have to arouse the *château*.

As for the reproach Monsieur makes me of being often without money; first, it is because I like to keep myself decent, as Monsieur may see; and then one must maintain the honour of the coat one wears: I know, indeed, that I ought, perhaps, to save a little for the future; but I trust entirely to the generosity of Monsieur, who is so good a master.

As for entering the service of Madame de Tourvel whilst remaining in that of Monsieur, I beg that Monsieur will not require this of me. It was very different with Madame la Duchesse; but certainly I would not wear a livery, and a livery of the robe no less, after having had the honour of being Monsieur's *chasseur*. In every other way, Monsieur may dispose of him who has the honour to remain, with as much affection as respect, his most humble servitor.

ROUX AZOLAN, *chasseur*.

Paris, 5th October, 17\*\*, at eleven o'clock at night.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND EIGHTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

O MY indulgent mother, how many thanks I have to render you, and what need I had of your letter! I have read it again and again; I cannot put it away from me. I owe to it the few less painful moments I have spent since my departure. How good you are! Prudence and virtue know then how to compassionate weakness! You take pity on my ills! Ah, if you knew them! . . . they are terrible. I thought I had experienced the pains of love; but the inexpressible torment, that which one must have felt to have any idea of it, is to be separated from the object of one's love, to be separated for ever! . . . Yes, the pain which crushes me to-day will return to-morrow, the day after, all my life! My God, how young I am still, and how long a time I have to suffer!

To be one's self the architect of one's own misery; to tear out one's heart with one's own hands; and, whilst suffering these insupportable sorrows, to feel at each instant that one can make them cease with a word, and that this word is a crime! Ah, my friend! . . . .

When I adopted this painful course, and separated myself from him, I hoped that absence would augment my courage and my strength: how greatly I was deceived!

It seems, on the contrary, as though it had completed the work of destruction. I had more to struggle against, 'tis true: but, even while resisting, all was not privation; at least I sometimes saw him; often even, without daring to direct my eyes towards him, I felt his own were fixed on me. Yes, my friend, I felt them; it seemed as though they warmed my soul; and without passing through my eyes, they none the less arrived at my heart. Now, in my grievous solitude, isolated from all that is dear to me, closeted with my misfortune, every moment of my sorrowful existence is marked by my tears, and nothing sweetens its bitterness; no consolation is mingled with my sacrifices; and those I have thus far made have only served to render more dolorous those which are left to make.

Yesterday again, I had a lively feeling of this. Amongst the letters they brought me, there was one from him; they were still two paces off from me when I recognized it amongst the rest. I rose involuntarily, I trembled, I could hardly hide my emotion; and this state was not altogether unpleasant. A moment later, finding myself alone, this deceitful sweetness soon vanished, and left me but one sacrifice the more to make. Could I actually open this letter, which, however, I burned to read? In the fatality which pursues me, the consolations which seem to present themselves do nothing, on the contrary, but impose fresh privations; and those become crueller still from the thought that M. de Valmont shares them.

There it is at last, that name which so constantly fills my mind, and which it costs me so much to write; the sort of reproach you make me really alarmed me. I beg you to believe that a false shame has not altered my confidence in you; and why should I fear to name him?



Ah, I blush for my sentiments, but not for the object which causes them! Who other than he is worthy to inspire them? However, I know not why, this name does not come naturally to my pen; and, even this time, I had need of reflexion to write it. I return to him.

You tell me that he seemed to you *keenly grieved at my departure*. What, then, did he do? What did he say? Did he speak of returning to Paris? I beg you to dissuade him as much as you can. If he has judged me aright, he cannot bear me any ill-will for this step: but he must feel also that it is a course from which there is no return. One of my greatest torments is not to know what he thinks. I have still his letter there . . . . but you are surely of my opinion that I ought not to open it.

It is only through you, my indulgent friend, that I can feel myself not entirely separated from him. I would not abuse your kindness; I understand, perfectly, that your letters cannot be long ones: but you will not deny your child two words; one to sustain her courage, and the other to console her. Adieu, my venerable friend.

Paris, 5th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND NINTH

CÉCILE VOLANGES TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

It is only to-day, Madame, that I have given M. de Valmont the letter which you have done me the honour to write me. I kept it for four days, in spite of the alarm which I often felt lest it should be found; but I concealed it very carefully; and, when my grief once more seized me, I shut myself up to reperuse it.

I quite see that what I believed to be so great a misfortune is hardly one at all; and I must confess that there is certainly pleasure in it: so much so that I hardly grieve about it any more. It is only the thought of Danceny which still sometimes torments me. But there are already moments when I do not think of him at all! Moreover it is true that M. de Valmont is mighty amiable!

I was reconciled with him two days ago: it was very easy for me; for I had but said two words to him, when he told me that, if I had anything to say to him, he would come to my chamber in the evening, and I only had to answer that I was very willing. And then, as soon as he had come there, he seemed no more vexed than if I had never done anything to him. He did not scold me till afterwards, and then very gently; and it was in a manner . . . . just like you; which

proved to me that he also had much friendship for me. I should not know how to tell you all the odd things he related to me, and which I never should have believed, particularly about Mamma. You would give me much pleasure by telling me if it is all true. What is very sure is that I could not restrain my laughter; so that once I burst out laughing, which gave us a mighty fright: for Mamma might have heard; and if she had come to see, what would have become of me? I am sure she would have sent me to the convent that very moment.

As we must be prudent, and as M. de Valmont has told me himself that he would not risk compromising me for anything in the world, we have agreed that henceforward he should only come to open the door, and that we should go to his room. In that, there is nothing to fear; I have already been there, yesterday, and even now, while I write to you, I am again expecting him to come. Now, Madame, I hope you will not scold me any more.

There is one thing, however, which has greatly surprised me in your letter; it is what you tell me against the time when I am married, with regard to Danceny and M. de Valmont. I fancy that one day, at the Opera, you told me, on the contrary, that, once married, I could only love my husband, and that I should even have to forget Danceny: for that matter, I may have misunderstood you, and I would far rather have it different, as now I shall not be so much afraid of the time for my marriage. I even desire it, since I shall have more liberty; and I hope then that I shall be able to arrange in such a fashion that I need only think of Danceny. I feel sure that I shall never be really happy except with him: for the idea of him always torments me now, and I have no happiness

except when I succeed in not thinking of him, which is very difficult; and, as soon as I think of him, I at once become sad again.

What consoles me a little is that you assure me Danceny will love me the more for this: but are you quite certain? . . . Oh, yes, you would not deceive me! It is amusing, however, that it is Danceny I love, and that M. de Valmont . . . But, as you say, perhaps it is fortunate! Well, we shall see.

I understood none too well what you said about my fashion of writing. It seems to me that Danceny finds my letters good as they are. I quite feel, however, that I ought to tell him nothing of what passes with M. de Valmont: thus you have no reason to be afraid.

Mamma has not yet spoken to me of my marriage: but let her do so; when she speaks to me of it, since it is to entrap me, I promise you I shall know how to lie.

Adieu, my dear, kind friend; I thank you mightily, and I promise you I will never forget all your kindnesses to me. I must finish now; it is near one o'clock; so M. de Valmont cannot be long now.

At the Château de . . . , 10th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TENTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

*"Powers of Heaven! I had a soul for sorrow, grant me one now for felicity."* <sup>1</sup> It is the tender Saint-Preux, I think, who thus expresses himself. Better balanced than he, I possess these two existences at once. Yes, my friend, I am at the same time most happy and most miserable; and since you have my entire confidence, I owe you the double relation of my pleasures and my pains.

Know then that my ungrateful Puritan treats me ever with the same rigour. I am at the fourth letter which has been returned. Perhaps I am wrong to call it the fourth; for, having excellently well divined, on the return of the first, that it would be followed by many others, and being unwilling thus to waste my time, I adopted the course of turning my complaints into commonplaces, and putting no date: and, since the second post, it is always the same letter which comes and goes; I merely change the envelope. If my fair one ends as ordinarily end the fair, and softens, if only from lassitude, she will keep the missive at last; and it will be time enough then to pick up the threads. You see that, with this new manner of correspondence, I cannot be perfectly well informed.

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<sup>1</sup> *La Nouvelle Héloïse.*

I have discovered, however, that the fickle creature has changed her confidant: at least, I have made sure that, since her departure from the *château*, no letter has come for Madame de Volanges, whilst there have been two for the old Rosemonde; and, as the latter says nothing to us of them, as she no longer opens her mouth on the subject of *her dearest fair*, of whom previously she never ceased to speak, I concluded that it was she who had her confidence. I presume that, on one side, the need of speaking of me and, on the other, a little shame at returning with Madame de Volanges to the subject of a sentiment so long disavowed have caused this great revolution. I fear that I have lost by the change: for, the older women grow, the more crabbed and severe do they become. The first would have told her far more ill of me: but the latter will say more of love; and the sensitive prude has far more fear of the sentiment than of the person.

The only means of getting at the facts, is, as you see, to intercept the clandestine correspondence. I have already sent the order to my *chasseur*; and I am daily awaiting its execution. So far, I can do nothing except at random: thus, for the last week, I run my mind in vain over all recognized means, all those in the novels and in my private recollections; I can find none which befits either the circumstances of the adventure or the character of the heroine. The difficulty would not be to present myself before her, even in the night, nor again to induce her slumber, and make of her a new *Clarissa*: but, after more than two months of care and trouble, to have recourse to means which are foreign to me! To follow slavishly in the track of others, and triumph without glory! . . . . No, she shall not have *the pleasures of vice and the honours of*



*virtue.*<sup>1</sup> 'Tis not enough for me to possess her, I wish her to give herself. Now, for that, I need not only to penetrate to her presence, but to reach her by her own consent; to find her alone and with the intention of listening to me; above all, to close her eyes as to the danger; for if she sees it, she will know how to surmount it or to die. But the more clearly I see what I need to do, the more difficult do I find its execution; and though it should induce you to laugh at me once more, I will confess that my embarrassment is enhanced in proportion to the extent to which it occupies me.

My brain would reel, I think, were it not for the lucky distraction which our common pupil affords me; I owe it to her that I have still something else to do than compose elegies. Would you believe that this little girl had taken such fright that three whole days passed before your letter produced its effect? 'Tis thus that one false idea can spoil the most fortunate nature! In short, it was not until Saturday that she came and hovered round me, and stammered out a few words, and those pronounced in so low a voice, so stifled with shame, that it was impossible to hear them. But the blush which accompanied them made me guess their sense. Thus far, I had retained my pride: but, subdued by so pleasant a repentance, I consented to promise a visit to the fair penitent that same evening; and this grace on my part was received with all the gratitude that so great a condescension demanded.

As I never lose sight either of your projects or my own, I resolved to profit by this occasion to gain a just estimate of the child's value, and also to accelerate her

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<sup>1</sup> *La Nouvelle Héloïse.*

education. But to pursue this work with greater freedom, I found it necessary to change the place of our *rendez-vous*; for a simple closet, which separates your pupil's room from that of her mother, could not inspire sufficient security to allow her to reveal herself at her ease. I promised myself then *innocently* to make some noise, which would cause her enough alarm to induce her, for the future, to seek a safer asylum; this trouble she spared me again.

The little person loves laughter; and to promote her gaiety, I bethought myself, during our *entr'actes*, to relate to her all the scandalous anecdotes which occurred to my mind; and, so as to render them more piquant and better to fix her attention, I attributed them all to her mother, whom I was thus pleased to bedaub with vice and ridicule. It was not without motive that I made this choice; it encouraged my timid school-girl better than anything else, and I inspired her, at the same time, with the most profound contempt for her mother. I have long remarked that, if it be not always necessary to employ this means to seduce a young girl, it is indispensable, and often even the most efficacious, when one wishes to deprave her; for she who does not respect her mother will not respect herself: a moral truth which I hold to be so useful that I have been glad indeed to have furnished an example in support of the precept.

Meanwhile, your pupil, who had no thought of morals, was stifling her laughter every moment; finally, she had almost thought to have burst out with it. I had no difficulty in persuading her that she had made *a terrible noise*. I feigned a huge fright, which she easily shared. That she might the better remember it, I did not give way to the pleasure of a reappearance, and left her alone, three

hours earlier than was customary; we agreed, therefore, on separating, that, from the morrow, it was in my room that we should meet.

I have already twice received her there; and in this short period the scholar has become almost as learned as the master. Yes, in truth, I have taught her everything, even to complaisances! I have only made an exception of precautions.

Occupied thus all night, I gain thereby in that I sleep a great portion of the day; and as the actual society of the *château* has nothing to attract me, I hardly appear in the *salon* for an hour during the day. To-day, I even adopted the course of eating in my room, and I do not intend to leave it again, except for short walks. These eccentricities pass on the ground of my health. I have declared that I am *worn out with vapours*; I have also announced a little fever. It cost me no more than to speak in a slow and faint voice. As for the alteration in my face, trust your pupil for that. "*Love will provide.*"<sup>1</sup>

I employ my leisure in meditating means of recovering over my ingrate the advantages I have lost; and also in composing a sort of catechism of debauch for the use of my scholar. I amuse myself by mentioning nothing except by its technical name; and I laugh in advance at the interesting conversation which this ought to furnish between Gercourt and herself on the first night of their marriage. Nothing could be more amusing than the ingenuity with which she makes use already of the little she knows of this tongue! She has no conception that one can speak differently. This child is really seductive! The contrast

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<sup>1</sup> "*L'amour y pourvoira.*" Regnard: *Les Folies amoureuses*.

of naive candour with the language of effrontery does not fail to have an effect; and, I know not why, but it is only *bizarre* things which give me any longer pleasure.

Perhaps, I am abandoning myself overmuch to this, since I am compromising by it both my time and my health: but I hope that my feigned malady, besides that it will save me from the *ennui* of the drawing-room, will, perhaps, be of some use to me with the rigid Puritan, whose ferocious virtue is none the less allied with soft sensibility. I doubt not but that she is already informed of this mighty event, and I have a great desire to know what she thinks of it; all the more so in that I will wager she does not fail to attribute the honour of it to herself. I shall regulate the state of my health according to the impression which it makes upon her.

Here you are, my fair friend, as fully acquainted with my affairs as I am myself. I hope to have, shortly, more interesting news to tell you; and I beg you to believe that, in the pleasure which I promise myself, I count for much the reward which I expect from you.

At the Château de . . . , 11th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH

THE COMTE DE GERCOURT TO MADAME DE VOLANGES

ALL seems to be quiet in this country, Madame; and we expect, from day to day, the permission to return to France. I hope you will not doubt that I have always the same eagerness to betake myself thither, and to tie there the knots which are to unite me to you and to Mademoiselle de Volanges. Meanwhile, M. le Duc de \*\*\*, my cousin, to whom, as you know, I am under so many obligations, has just informed me of his recall from Naples. He tells me that he intends to pass through Rome, and to see, on his road, that part of Italy with which he is not yet acquainted. He begs me to accompany him on this journey, which will take about six weeks or two months. I do not hide from you that it would be agreeable to me to profit by this opportunity; feeling sure that, once married, I shall with difficulty find the time for other absences than those which my service demands. Perhaps, also, it would be more proper, to wait till winter for the wedding, since it will not be till then that all my kinsmen will be assembled in Paris; and notably M. le Marquis de \*\*\*, to whom I owe my hope of belonging to you. In spite of these considerations, my plans in this respect will be entirely subordinate to your own; and if you should have the slightest

preference for your first arrangements, I am ready to abandon mine. I beg you only to let me know, as early as possible, your intentions on this subject. I will await your reply here, and it alone shall regulate my action.

I am with respect, Madame, and with all the sentiments that befit a son, your most humble, etc.

The Comte DE GERCOURT.

Bastia, 10th October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

(Dictated)

I HAVE only this instant received, my dearest fair, your letter of the 11th,<sup>1</sup> and the gentle reproaches which it contains. Confess that you were quite disposed to make one more; and that, if you had not recollected that you were *my daughter*, you would have really scolded me. Yet you would have been very unjust! It was the desire and hope I had of being able to reply to you myself which made me postpone this from day to day; and you see that, even to-day, I am obliged to borrow the hand of my maid. My wretched rheumatism has come back again; it has taken up its abode this time in the right arm, and I am absolutely crippled. That is what it is, young and fresh as you are, to have so old a friend! One suffers for those incongruities.

As soon as my pains give me a little respite, I promise to have a long talk with you. In the meantime, I merely tell you that I have received your two letters; that they would have redoubled, had that been possible, my tender friendship for you; and that I shall never cease to take a very lively interest in all that concerns you.

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<sup>1</sup> This letter has not been recovered.

My nephew too is somewhat indisposed, but in no danger, nor is there need for the least anxiety; it is a slight indisposition which, as it appears to me, affects his humour more than his health. We see hardly anything of him now.

His retreat and your departure do not add to the gaiety of our little circle. The little Volanges, especially, misses you furiously, and yawns consumedly all day long. Since the last few days, in particular, she has done us the honour of falling into a profound sleep every afternoon.

Adieu, my dearest fair; I am always your very good friend, your mamma, your sister even, did my great age permit that title. In short, I am attached to you by all the most affectionate sentiments.

*Signed:* ADELAIDE, for Madame DE ROSEMONDE.

At the Château de . . . , 14th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

I THINK I ought to warn you, Vicomte, that they are beginning to busy themselves with you in Paris; your absence is remarked there, and they are already divining the cause. I was yesterday at a very numerous supper; it was said positively that you were retained in the country by an unhappy and romantic love: joy was immediately depicted on the faces of all those envious of your success, and of all the women whom you have neglected. If you are advised by me, you will not let these dangerous rumours acquire credit, but will come at once to destroy them by your presence.

Remember that, if you once allow the idea that you are irresistible to be lost, you will soon find that it will, as a matter of fact, become easier to resist you; that your rivals, too, will lose their respect for you, and dare to combat you: for which of them does not believe himself stronger than virtue? Reflect above all that, in the multitude of women whom you have advertised, all those whom you have not had will endeavour to undeceive the public, whilst the others will exert themselves to hoodwink it. In short, you must expect to be appreciated, perhaps, as much below your value, as you have been, hitherto, beyond it.

Come back, then, Vicomte, and do not sacrifice your reputation to a puerile caprice. You have done all we wished with the little Volanges; and as for your Présidente, it is not, apparently, by remaining ten leagues away from her, that you will get over your fantasy. Do you think she will come to fetch you? Perhaps she has already ceased to dream of you, or is only so far occupied with you as to congratulate herself on having humiliated you. At any rate, here you will be able to find some opportunity of a brilliant reappearance: and you have need of one; and even if you insist on your ridiculous adventure, I do not see how your return can hurt it... on the contrary.

In effect, if your Présidente *adores you*, as you have so often told me and said so little to prove, her sole consolation, her sole pleasure now, must be to talk of you, and to know what you are doing, what you are saying, what you are thinking, even the slightest detail which concerns you. These trifles increase in value according to the extent of the privations one endures. They are the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table: he disdains them; but the poor man collects them greedily. Now the poor Présidente gathers up all these crumbs at present; and the more she has, the less will be her haste to abandon herself to her appetite for the rest.

Moreover, since you know her confidant, you cannot doubt but that each of her letters contains at least one little sermon, and all that she thinks befitting "*to corroborate her prudence and fortify her virtue.*"<sup>1</sup> Why, then, leave to the one resources to defend herself, to the other the means of injuring you?

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<sup>1</sup> From the comedy, "*On ne s'avise jamais de tout!*"

It is not that I am at all of your opinion as to the loss you believe you have sustained by the change of confidant. In the first place, Madame de Volanges hates you, and hatred is always clearer-sighted and more ingenious than friendship. All the virtue of your old aunt will not persuade her to speak ill of her dear nephew, for virtue also has its weaknesses. Next, your fears depend upon a consideration which is absolutely false.

It is not true that *the older women grow, the more crabbed and severe they become*. It is betwixt the ages of forty and fifty that their despair at the sight of their fading faces, their rage at feeling obliged to abandon their pretensions and the pleasures to which they still cling, render almost all women scolds and shrews. They need this long interval to make the great sacrifice in its entirety; but, as soon as it is consummated, all distribute themselves into two classes. The most numerous, that of the women who have had nothing in their favour save their faces and youth, falls into an imbecile apathy, and only issues from this for the sake of play or of a few practices of devotion; this kind is always tiresome, often fond of scolding, sometimes a little mischievous, but rarely malicious. One cannot tell, either, whether these women are, or are not, severe: without ideas, without an existence, they repeat indifferently, and without understanding, all that they hear said, and in themselves remain absolutely null. The other class, far rarer, but really precious, is that of the women who, having possessed character, and not having neglected to cultivate their reason, know how to create an existence for themselves when that of nature fails them, and adopt the plan of transferring to their minds the adornments

which they had before employed for their faces. These last have, as a rule, a very sound judgment and an intelligence at once solid, gay, and gracious. They replace seductive charms by ingratiating kindness, and even by sprightliness, the charm of which increases in proportion to their age: it is thus that they succeed, after a fashion, in attracting youth by making themselves loved by it. But then, far from being, as you say, *crabbed and severe*, the habit of indulgence, their long reflexions upon human frailty, and, above all, the memories of their youth, through which alone they have a hold on life, would rather place them, perhaps too much, on the side of complaisance.

What I may say to you, finally, is that, having always sought out old women, the utility of whose support I recognized at an early age, I have encountered several amongst them to whom I was led as much by inclination as interest. I stop there: for nowadays, when you take fire so quickly and so morally, I should be afraid lest you fell suddenly in love with your aged aunt, and buried yourself with her in the tomb in which you have already lived so long. I resume then.

In spite of the state of enchantment in which you seem to be with your little school-girl, I cannot believe that she counts at all in your projects. You found her to your hand, you took her: well and good! But it cannot be that your fancy enters into it. To tell the truth, it is not even a complete pleasure: you possess absolutely nothing beyond her person! I do not speak of her heart, in which I do not doubt you take not the slightest interest; but you do not even fill her head. I know not whether you have perceived it, but, for myself, I have the proof of it in the



last letter she sent me;<sup>1</sup> I send it you, that you may judge of it. Observe that when she speaks of you, it is always as *M. de Valmont*; that all her ideas, even those which you give rise to, always end in Danceny; and she does not call him Monsieur, it is plain *Danceny* always. Thereby, she singles him out from all the rest; and, even whilst abandoning herself to you, she is familiar only with him. If such a conquest seems to you *seductive*, if the pleasures she gives *attach you*, you are assuredly modest and not hard to please! That you should retain her, I consent to that; it even forms part of my projects. But it seems to me that it is not worth putting yourself to a quarter of an hour's inconvenience; also, that you had best acquire some dominion over her, and not allow her, for instance, to approach Danceny until after you have made her forget him a little more.

Before I cease to occupy myself with you, and come to myself, I wish to tell you again that this means of sickness, which you announce it is your resolve to employ, is well known and mighty stale. Truly, Vicomte, you have no invention! I myself repeat myself sometimes, as you are about to see; but I try to save myself by the details and, above all, I am justified by success. I am going to try another still, and run after a new adventure. I admit that it will not have the merit of difficulty; but at least it will be a distraction, and I am perishing with *ennui*.

I know not why, but, since the adventure of Prévau, Belleruche has become insupportable. He has redoubled his attention, his tenderness, his *veneration* to such a degree that I can no longer submit to it. His anger seemed to

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<sup>1</sup> See letter the hundred and ninth.

me, at the outset, amusing; it was very necessary, however, to calm it, for to let him go on would have been to compromise myself; and there was no means of making him listen to reason. I adopted the course then of showing him more love, in order to make an end of it more easily: but he has taken this seriously, and ever since surfeits me with his eternal delight. I notice, especially, the insulting trust which he shews in me, and the security with which he considers me as his for ever. I am really humiliated by it. He must rate me lightly indeed, if he believes he has worth enough to make me constant! Did he not tell me recently that I could never have loved anyone but himself? Oh, for the moment I had need of all my prudence not to undeceive him on the spot, by telling him how matters stood. A merry gentleman, forsooth, to think he has exclusive rights! I admit that he is well made and of a fair enough countenance; but, all considered, he is, in fact, but a journeyman love-maker. In short, the moment has come when we must separate.

I have been attempting this for the last fortnight, and have employed, in turn, coldness, caprice, ill-humour, and quarrels; but the tenacious personage is not made thus to lose his hold: a more violent method must be adopted therefore; consequently, I am taking him to my country-place. We leave the day after to-morrow. With us there will only be a few uninterested persons, by no means clear-sighted, and we shall have almost as much liberty as if we were there alone. There I will surfeit him with love and caresses to such a degree, we will live there so entirely for one another, that I wager he will be more desirous than I am myself for the end of this expedition, which he considers so great a piece of good fortune; and, if

he does not return more weary of me than I am of him, tell me that I know no more than you, and I will admit it.

My pretext for this sort of retreat is that I wish to busy myself exclusively with my great law-suit, which, in fact, will be at last decided at the commencement of the winter. I am very glad of it; for it is really disagreeable to have one's whole fortune hanging thus in the air. 'Tis not that I am at all anxious as to the result; in the first place, I am in the right, all my lawyers assure me so; and, even if I were not, I should be *maladroit* indeed if I knew not how to gain a suit where my only adversaries are minors, still of immature years, and their aged guardian! As nothing, however, should be neglected in a matter of so great importance, I shall have two advocates on my side. Does not this expedition seem to you gay? However, if it serves me to win my suit and rid myself of Belleruche, I shall not think the time wasted.

Now, Vicomte, divine his successor: I give you a hundred guesses. But what is the use? Do I not know that you never guess anything? Well then, it is Danceny! You are astonished, are you not? For after all I am not yet reduced to the education of children! But this one deserves to form an exception; he has but the graces of youth, and not its frivolity. His great reserve in society is well calculated to remove all suspicion, and one finds him only the more amiable, when he lets himself go in a *tête-à-tête*. Not that I have yet had one with him on my own account, I am still no more than his confidant; but beneath this veil of friendship, I believe I discern a very lively taste for me, and I feel that I am conceiving a great one for him. It were a mighty pity that so much wit and delicacy should

be debased and wasted upon that little fool of a Volanges! I hope he is deceived in believing that he loves her: she so little deserves it! 'Tis not that I am jealous of her; it is because it would be a crime, and I would save Danceny. I beg you then, Vicomte, to take precautions that he may not approach *his Cécile* (as he still has the bad habit of calling her). A first fancy has always more sway than one thinks; and I should feel sure of nothing, were he to see her again at present, especially during my absence. On my return, I charge myself with everything, and answer for the result.

I thought seriously of taking the young man with me: but, as usual, I have made a sacrifice to my prudence; moreover I should have been afraid lest he discovered anything between Belleruche and myself, and I should be in despair if he were to have the least idea of what was passing. I would at least offer myself to his imagination as pure and spotless, such indeed as one should be, to be really worthy of him.

Paris, 15th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FOURTEENTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

MY dear friend, I yield to the impulse of my grave anxiety; and without knowing whether you will be able to reply to me, I cannot refrain from questioning you. The condition of M. de Valmont, which you tell me is *not dangerous*, does not leave me as much confidence as you appear to have. It not rarely happens that melancholy and disgust with the world are the symptoms and precursors of some grave illness; the sufferings of the body, like those of the mind, make us desirous of solitude; and often we reproach with ill-humour him who should merely be pitied for his pain.

It seems to me that he ought at least to consult someone. How is it that you, who are ill yourself, have not a doctor by your side? My own, whom I have seen this morning, and whom, I do not conceal from you, I have indirectly consulted, is of opinion that, in persons naturally active, this sort of sudden apathy should never be neglected; and, as he said besides, sicknesses that are not taken in time no longer yield to treatment. Why let one who is so dear to you incur this risk?

What enhances my anxiety is that I have received no news of him for four days. My God! Are you not deceiving me as to his condition? Why should he have suddenly

ceased to write? If it were only the effect of my obstinacy in returning his letters to him, I think he would have adopted this course sooner. In short, although I do not believe in presentiments, I have been, for some days past, in a state of gloom which alarms me. Ah, perhaps I am on the eve of the greatest of misfortunes!

You would not believe, and I am ashamed to tell you, how pained I am not to receive those same letters which, however, I should still refuse to read. I was at least sure that he was thinking of me, and I saw something which came from him! I did not open those letters, but I wept when I looked at them: my tears were sweeter and more easy, and they alone partially dissipated the customary depression in which I live since my return. I conjure you, my indulgent friend, write to me yourself as soon as you are able, and, in the meanwhile, have your news and his sent to me daily.

I perceive that I have hardly said a word as to yourself, but you know my sentiments, my unlimited attachment, my tender gratitude for your sensitive friendship; you will pardon my trouble, my mortal sufferings, the terrible torture of having to dread calamities of which I am, perhaps, the cause. Great Heaven! this agonizing idea pursues me and rends my heart: this misfortune was lacking me, and I feel that I was born to experience all.

Adieu, my dear friend: love me, pity me. Shall I have a letter from you to-day?

Paris, 16th October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

It is an incredible thing, my lovely friend, how easily, when two people are separated, they cease to understand one another. As long as I was near you, we had never but one same feeling, one like fashion of seeing things; and, because for nearly three months I have ceased to see you, we are no longer of the same opinion upon anything. Which of us two is wrong? You would certainly not hesitate about your reply: but I, wiser or more polite, do not decide. I am only going to answer your letter, and continue to expound my conduct.

To begin with, I thank you for the notice you give me of the rumours which are current about me; but I am not yet uneasy: I believe I am certain to have something soon wherewith to make them cease. Reassure yourself; I shall reappear in the world only more celebrated than ever, and always more worthy of you.

I hope that even the adventure of the little Volanges will be counted for something to me, although you appear to make so little of it: as though it were nothing to carry off, in one evening, a young girl from her cherished lover; to make use of her afterwards as much as one wishes, and absolutely as one's own property,

without any further pother; to obtain from her favours which one does not even dare demand from all the wenches whose trade it is; and this without in the least distracting her from her tender love; without rendering her inconstant or even unfaithful: for, as you say, I do not even fill her head! So that, when my fantasy has passed, I shall restore her to the arms of her lover, so to speak, without her having perceived anything. Pray, is this a very ordinary achievement? And then, believe me, once issued from my hands, the principles which I am imparting to her will not fail to develop; and I predict that the shy scholar will soon soar upon a flight fitting to do honour to her master.

If, nevertheless, you prefer the heroic manner, I will shew you the Présidente, that exemplary model of all the virtues! respected even by our veriest libertines! of such a virtue that one had given up even the thought of attacking her! I will show her, I say, forgetting her duties and her virtue, sacrificing her reputation and two years of prudence, to run after the happiness of pleasing me, to intoxicate herself with that of loving me, finding herself sufficiently compensated for such sacrifices by a word, a glance, things which she will not even always obtain. I will do more, I will leave her; and either I do not know this woman, or she will not give me a successor. She will resist her need of consolation, the habit of pleasure, even the desire of vengeance. In short, she will have existed only for me; and, be her career short or long, I alone shall have opened and shut the barrier. Once having attained this triumph, I will say to my rivals: Behold my handiwork, and seek throughout the century for a second example!

You will ask me, whence comes to-day this excessive assurance? It is because for the last week I have been in my fair one's confidence; she does not tell me her secrets, but I surprise them. Two letters from her to Madame de Rosemonde have sufficiently instructed me, and I shall only read the others out of curiosity. I require absolutely nothing else to ensure success than to approach her, and I have found the means. I shall instantly employ them.

You are curious, I believe? . . . But no, to punish you for not believing in my inventions, you shall not know them. Once for all, if you had your deserts, I should withdraw my confidence from you, at least in this adventure; indeed, were it not for the sweet price you have set on my success, I should speak of it no further to you. You see that I am vexed. However, in the hope that you will correct yourself, I am willing to stop with this slight punishment; and, once more grown indulgent, will forget my rash projects for a moment, to discuss your own with you.

There you are then, in the country, which is as tedious as sentiment and as sad as constancy! And that poor Belleruche! You are not contented with making him drink the waters of oblivion, you must also put him to the torture! How does he like it? Does he bear up well beneath the nausea of love? I would give much to see him become only the more enamoured; I am curious to see what more efficacious remedy you would succeed in finding. I pity you, truly, that you have been compelled to have recourse to that. Once only in my life have I made love from calculation. I had certainly an excellent reason, since it was to the Comtesse de \*\*\*; and twenty times I was tempted to say, whilst in her

arms, "Madame, I renounce the place I am soliciting; permit me to retire from that which I occupy." Wherefore, of all the women I have had, she is the only one of whom it gives me real pleasure to speak ill.

As for your own motive, I find it, to tell the truth, of a rare absurdity; and you were right in believing I should never guess the successor. What! It is for Danceny you are taking all this trouble! Oh, my dear friend, leave him to adore *his virtuous Cécile*, and do not compromise yourself at these childish games. Leave boys to form themselves in their *nurses'* hands, or to play with school-girls at *little innocent games*. How can you burden yourself with a novice, who will know neither how to take you nor how to leave you, and with whom all will have to be done by you! I tell you, seriously, I disapprove of this choice; and however secret it may remain, it will humiliate you at least in my eyes and in your own conscience.

You have taken, you say, a great fancy to him: nay, nay, you surely make a mistake; and I even believe I have found the source of your error. This fine disgust with Belleruche came to you at a time of famine; and, as Paris offered you no choice, your ideas, which are always too volatile, turned towards the first object they encountered. But reflect: on your return you will be able to choose between a thousand; and if, in fine, you dread the inaction in which you risk falling if you delay, I offer myself to you to amuse your leisure.

By the time of your arrival, my great affairs will be terminated in some fashion or other; and assuredly neither the little Volanges nor the Présidente herself will occupy me so much then as to prevent me from being with you as much as you desire. Perhaps, even, between now and





M.<sup>e</sup> Gérard del.

Leauquet sculp.



then, I shall have already restored the little girl into the hands of her discreet lover. Without admitting, whatever you may say, that it is not a pleasure which *attaches*, as it is my intention that she should retain all her life a superior notion of me to that of all other men, I have adopted a tone with her, which I could not keep up long without injuring my health; and, from henceforth, I am only drawn to her by the care which one owes to family affairs....

You do not understand me?.... The fact is that I am awaiting a second period to confirm my hope, and to assure me that I have thoroughly succeeded in my projects. Yes, my lovely friend, I have already a first promise that the husband of my pupil will not run the risk of dying without posterity; and that the head of the house of Gercourt will be in future only a cadet of that of Valmont. But let me finish, at my fantasy, this adventure which I only undertook at your entreaty. Remember that, if you render Danceny inconstant, you destroy all the raciness of the story. Consider, finally, that offering, as I do, to serve you, I have, it seems to me, some right to be preferred.

I count so much on this, that I am not afraid to cross your views, by endeavouring myself to augment the discreet lover's tender passion for the first and worthy object of his choice. Yesterday, having found your pupil employed in writing to him, after I had first disturbed her at this sweet occupation for the sake of another, sweeter still, I asked to see her letter; and as I found it cold and constrained, I made her feel that it was not thus that she should console her lover, and persuaded her to write another at my dictation; in which, imitating, as well as I could, her little prattle, I tried to foster the young man's love by a more certain hope. The little person was quite

enchanted, she said, to find herself expressing herself so well; and, for the future, I am to be charged with the correspondence. What have I not done for this Danceny? I shall have been at once his friend, his confidant, his rival and his mistress! Again, at this moment, I am rendering him the service of saving him from your dangerous chains. Yes, dangerous without a doubt: for to possess you and lose you is to buy a moment of happiness with an eternity of regret. Adieu, my lovely friend; have the courage to dispatch Belleruche as soon as you can. Leave Danceny alone, and prepare yourself to receive once more, and to renew to me, the delicious pleasures of our first *liaison*.

P.S. I congratulate you upon the approaching decision of the great law-suit. I shall be delighted if this happy event occurs during my reign.

At the Château de . . . , 19th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTEENTH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO CÉCILE VOLANGES

MADAME DE MERTEUIL left this morning for the country; thus, my charming Cécile, I am now deprived of the sole pleasure which remained to me during your absence, that of talking of you to your friend and mine. For some time past, she has allowed me to give her that title; and I have profited by it with all the more eagerness because it seemed to bring me nearer to you. Lord! how amiable this woman is! And with what a flattering charm she knows how to endow friendship! It seems as though that sweet sentiment is embellished and fortified in her by all that she denies to love. If you knew how she loves you, how it pleases her to hear me speak of you! . . . 'Tis that, no doubt, which draws me so much towards her. What happiness it were, to be able to live entirely for you both, to pass uninterruptedly from the delights of love to the sweets of friendship, to consecrate all my existence to it, to be in some measure the point of union of your mutual attachment, and to feel always that, in occupying myself with the happiness of the one, I was working equally for that of the other. Love, love dearly, my charming friend, this adorable woman. Give greater value still to the attachment I have for her by participating in it.

Since I have tasted the charm of friendship, I am desirous that you should experience it in your turn. From pleasures which I do not share with you I seem only to obtain a half enjoyment. Yes, my Cécile, I would fain surround your heart with all the softest sentiments, so that its every vibration might give you a sensation of happiness; and I should still feel that I could never repay you more than a part of the felicity which I should derive from you.

Why must it be that these charming projects are only a chimera of my imagination, and that reality offers me, on the contrary, only indefinite and dolorous privations? The hope which you had held out to me of seeing you in the country I see well that I must renounce. I have no other consolation than that of persuading myself that you do really find it impossible. And you refrain from telling me this, from grieving over it with me! Twice already have my complaints on this subject been left without a reply. Ah! Cécile, Cécile, I do believe that you love me with all the faculties of your soul; but your soul is not ardent like my own. Why does it not lie with me to overthrow the obstacles? Why is it not my interests that have to be considered instead of yours? I should know how to prove to you that nothing is impossible to love.

You tell me nothing, either, of the duration of this cruel absence: here, at least, I should perhaps see you. Your charming eyes would reanimate my drooping soul; their touching expression would reassure my heart, which has sometimes need of it. Forgive me, my Cécile; this fear is not a suspicion. I believe in your love, in your constancy. Ah, I should be too unhappy, if I were to doubt it. But so many obstacles! And always renewed! I am sad, my friend, very sad. It seems as though the departure of

Madame de Merteuil had renewed in me the sentiment of all my woes.

Adieu, my Cécile; adieu, my beloved. Remember that your lover is grieving, and that you alone can restore him to happiness.

Paris, 17th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH

CÉCILE VOLANGES TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

(Dictated by Valmont)

Do you think then, my dear friend, that I had any need of scolding to make me sad, when I know that you grieve? And do you doubt that I suffer as much as you, at all your sorrows? I even share those which I cause you knowingly; and I have one more than you when I see that you do not do me justice. Oh! that is not right! Indeed, I see what vexes you; it is that, the last two times you asked to come here, I did not answer you: but was the answer such an easy one to give? Do you suppose I do not know that what you want is very wicked? And yet, if I have already so much difficulty in refusing you at a distance, pray, what would it be if you were here? And then, because I had wished to console you for a moment, I should be sorry all my life.

See, I have nothing to conceal from you; here are my reasons, judge for yourself. I should, perhaps, have done what you wish, had it not been for what I have told you, the news that this M. de Gercourt, who is the cause of all my grief, will not arrive yet awhile; and as Mamma, for some time past, has shown me much more kindness; as I, on my side, caress her as much as



I can, who knows what I may not be able to obtain from her? And if we could be happy without my having anything to reproach myself with, would not that be much better? If I am to believe what I have been often told, men no longer love their wives so much, if they have loved them overmuch before they were wives. That fear restrains me even more than the rest. My friend, are you not sure of my heart, and will there not be always time?

Listen; I promise you that, though I cannot avoid the misfortune of marrying M. de Gercourt, whom I hate so much already before I know him, nothing shall any longer prevent me from being yours as much as I am able; and even before everything. As I do not care to be loved except by you, and you must see quite well that, if I do wrong, it is not my fault, the rest will be just the same to me; provided that you promise to love me always as much as you do now. But until then, my friend, let me continue as I am; and ask me no more for a thing which I have good reasons for declining to do, and which it yet vexes me to refuse you.

I should be very glad, too, if M. de Valmont were not so urgent for you; it only serves to make me grieve still more. Oh, you have a very good friend in him, I assure you! He does everything that you would do yourself. But adieu, my dear love; it was very late when I began to write to you, and I have spent part of the night over it. I am going to bed now, and to make up for the lost time. I embrace you, but do not scold me any more.

At the Château de . . . , 18th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND EIGHTEENTH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

IF I am to believe my almanack, my adorable friend, it is but two days that you have been absent; but, if I am to believe my heart, it is two centuries. Now, I have it from yourself, it is always one's heart that one should believe; it is therefore quite time then that you should return, and all your affairs must be more than finished. How can you expect me to be interested in your lawsuit, when, be it lost or won, I must equally pay the costs by the tedium of your absence? Oh, how querulous I feel! And how sad it is to have so fair a subject for ill-humour, but no right to show it!

Is it not, however, a real infidelity, a black betrayal, to leave your friend far away from you, after having accustomed him to be unable to dispense with your presence? In vain will you consult your advocates, they will find you no justification for this ill-behaviour; and then those gentry do but talk of reasons, and reasons are not sufficient answer to sentiments.

For myself, you have told me so often that it was reason which sent you on this journey, that I have entirely done with it. I will no longer listen to it, not even when it tells me to forget you. That is, however, a most

reasonable reason: in fact, it would not be so difficult as you suppose. It would be sufficient merely to lose the habit of always thinking of you; and nothing here, I assure you, would recall you to me.

Our loveliest women, those who are said to be the most amiable, are yet so far below you that they could but give a very feeble idea of you. I think even that, with practised eyes, the more one thought at first they resembled you, the more difference one would remark afterwards: in vain their efforts, in vain their display of all they know, they always fail in being you; and therein, positively, lies the charm. Unhappily, when the days are so long, and one is unoccupied, one dreams, one builds castles in the air, one creates one's chimera; little by little the imagination is exalted; one would fain beautify one's work, one gathers together all that may please, finally one arrives at perfection; and, as soon as one is there, the portrait recalls the model, and one is astonished to find that one has but dreamed of you.

At this very moment, I am again the dupe of an almost similar error. You will believe, perhaps, that it was in order to occupy myself with you that I started to write to you? Not at all: it was to distract myself from you. I had a hundred things to say of which you were not the object, things which, as you know, interest me very keenly; and it is from these, nevertheless, that I have been distracted. And since when, pray, does the charm of friendship divert us from that of love? Ah, if I were to look closely into the matter, perhaps I should have a slight reproach to make myself! But hush! Let us forget this little error, for fear of reverting to it, and let my friend herself ignore it.

Why, then, are you not here to reply to me, to lead me back if I go astray, to talk to me of my Cécile, to enhance, if that be possible, the happiness I derive from her love by the sweet thought that, in loving her, I love your friend? Yes, I confess it, the love which she inspires in me has become even more precious since you have been kind enough to receive my confidence. I love so much to open my heart to you, to pour my sentiments unreservedly into yours! It seems to me that I cherish them the more, when you deign to receive them; and again I look at you and say to myself: It is in her that all my happiness is bound up.

I have nothing new to tell you with regard to my situation. The last letter I received from *her* increases and assures my hope, but delays it still. However, her motives are so tender and so pure that I can neither blame her for them nor complain. Perhaps you do not understand too well what I am telling you; but why are you not here? Although one may say all to one's friend, one dare not write it. The secrets of love, especially, are so delicate that one may not let them go thus upon their *parole*. If one allows them out sometimes, one must none the less never let them out of sight; one must, as it were, see them reach their new refuge. Ah, come back then, my adorable friend; you see how very necessary is your return. Forget, in short, the *thousand reasons* which detain you where you are, or teach me to live where you are not.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Paris, 19th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND NINETEENTH

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

ALTHOUGH I am still suffering greatly, my dearest fair, I am endeavouring to write to you myself, in order to be able to speak to you of what interests you. My nephew still keeps up his misanthropy. He sends every day most regularly to ask after my health; but he has not come once to enquire for himself, although I have begged him to do so. Thus I see no more of him than if he were in Paris. I met him to-day, however, in a place where I little expected him. It was in my chapel, whither I had gone for the first time since my painful indisposition. I learned to-day that for the last four days he has gone regularly to hear mass. God grant that this last!

When I entered, he came up to me, and congratulated me most affectionately on the improved state of my health. As mass was beginning, I cut short the conversation, which I expected to resume afterwards; but he had disappeared before I could rejoin him. I will not hide from you that I found him somewhat changed. But, my dearest fair, do not make me repent of my confidence in your reason, by a too lively anxiety; and, above all, rest assured that I would rather choose to pain than deceive you.

If my nephew continues to keep aloof from me, I will adopt the course, as soon as I am better, of visiting him in his chamber; and I will try to penetrate the cause of this singular mania, which, I can well believe, has something to do with you. I will write and tell you anything I may find out. Now I take leave of you, as I can no more move my fingers: besides, if Adelaide knew that I had written, she would scold me all the evening. Adieu, my dearest fair.

At the Château de . . . , 20th October, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH

### THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE PÈRE ANSELME

(a Bernardine of the monastery of the Rue Saint-Honoré)

I HAVE not the honour of being known to you, Monsieur: but I know of the entire confidence which Madame la Présidente de Tourvel reposes in you, and I know, moreover, how much this confidence is deserved. I believe, then, that I may address myself to you without indiscretion, in order to obtain a very essential service, truly worthy of your holy office, and one in which the interests of Madame de Tourvel and myself are one.

I have in my hands important papers which concern her, which cannot be entrusted to anybody, and which I would not, and must not, give up except into her hands. I have no means of informing her of this, because reasons which, perhaps, you will have heard from her, but which I do not consider myself authorized to state, have led her to take the course of refusing all correspondence with me: a course that, to-day, I confess willingly, I cannot blame, since she could not foresee events which I myself was very far from expecting, and which were only rendered possible by that superhuman force which we are forced to recognize. I beg you, therefore, Monsieur, to be so good as to inform her of my new resolutions, and

to ask her to grant me a private interview, in which I can, at least in part, repair my errors and, as a last sacrifice, destroy in her presence the sole existing traces of an error or fault which has rendered me guilty in her eyes.

It will not be until after this preliminary expiation that I shall dare to lay at your feet the humiliating confession of my long disorders, and to entreat your mediation for an even more important and, unhappily, more difficult reconciliation. May I hope, Monsieur, that you will not refuse me this precious and necessary aid, and that you will deign to sustain my weakness and guide my feet into the new way which I desire most ardently to follow, but which, I blush to confess, I do not yet know?

I await your reply with the impatience of the repentance which desires to make reparation, and I beg you to believe me, with equal gratitude and veneration,

Your most humble, etc.

P.S. I authorize you, Monsieur, should you deem it proper, to communicate this letter in its entirety to Madame de Tourvel, whom I shall make it my duty to respect all my life long, and in whom I shall never cease to honour one whom Heaven has used to bring back my soul to virtue, by the touching spectacle of her own.

At the Château de . . . , 22nd October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIRST

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

I HAVE received your letter, my too youthful friend; but, before I thank you, I must scold you, and I warn you that, if you do not correct yourself, you shall have no more answers from me. Quit then, if you will believe me, that tone of flattery, which is no more than jargon, when it is not the expression of love. Pray, is that the language of friendship? No, my friend, every sentiment has its befitting speech, and to make use of any other is to disguise the thought which one expresses. I am well aware that our frivolous women understand nothing that is said to them, if it be not translated, in some way, into this customary jargon; but I confess that I thought I deserved that you should distinguish between them and me. I am truly grieved, and perhaps more than I ought to be, that you have judged me so ill.

You will only find then in my letter the qualities which yours lacks: frankness and simplicity. I will certainly tell you, for instance, that it would give me great pleasure to see you, and that I am vexed to have only tiresome people round me instead of people who please me; but this very phrase you translate thus: *Teach me to live where you are not*; so that, I suppose, when you are with your mistress,

you will not be able to live unless I make a third. The pity of it! And these women *who always fail in being me*: perhaps you find that your Cécile also fails in that! That, however, is the result of a language which, owing to the abuse made of it nowadays, is even lower than the jargon of compliments, and has become no more than a mere formula, in which one no more believes than in a most humble servant.

My friend, when you write to me, let it be to tell me your fashion of thinking and feeling, and not to send me phrases which I can find, without your aid, more or less well turned in any novel of the day. I hope you will not be angry at what I am telling you, even if you should detect a little ill-humour; for I do not deny I feel some: but, to avoid even the shadow of the fault for which I reproach you, I will not tell you that this ill-humour is, perhaps, somewhat augmented by the distance at which I am from you. It seems to me that, all considered, you are worth more than a law-suit and two advocâtes, perhaps, even more than the *attentive* Belleruche.

You see that, instead of despairing at my absence, you ought to congratulate yourself upon it, for I have never paid you so pretty a compliment. I believe your example is catching, and I, too, am inclined to flatter you: but nay, I prefer to keep to my frankness; it is that alone, then, which assures you of my tender friendship, and of the interest which it inspires in me. It is very sweet to have a young friend whose heart is occupied elsewhere. That is not the system of all women, but it is mine. It seems to me that one abandons one's self with more pleasure to a sentiment from which one can have nothing to fear: thus I have passed with you, early enough, perhaps, into the rôle of confidant.

But you choose your mistresses so young that you have made me perceive for the first time that I begin to grow old! You have acted well in preparing for yourself a long career of constancy, and I wish with all my heart that it may be reciprocated.

You are right in yielding to the *pure and tender motives* which, according to what you tell me, *delay your happiness*. A long defence is the only merit left to those who do not resist always; and what I should find unpardonable in any other than a child like the little Volanges would be the lack of knowledge how to escape a danger of which she has been amply forewarned by the confession she has made of her love. You men have no idea of what virtue is, nor of what it costs to sacrifice it! But, however incapable a woman may be of reasoning, she ought to know that, independently of the sin which she commits, a frailty is the greatest of misfortunes to her; and I cannot conceive how anyone can ever let herself be caught, if she has time for a moment's reflexion on the subject.

Do not proceed to dispute this idea, for it is this which principally attaches me to you. You will save me from the perils of love; and, although I have known well enough hitherto to defend myself without your aid, I consent to be grateful to you for it, and I shall love you for it the more and better.

Upon this, my dear Chevalier, I pray God to have you in His good and holy keeping.

At the Château de . . . , 22nd October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SECOND

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

I HAD hoped, my amiable daughter, to be able at last to calm your anxieties; and I see with grief, on the contrary, that I must still augment them. Be calm, however; my nephew is not in danger: I cannot even say that he is really ill. But something extraordinary is assuredly passing within him. I understand naught of it; but I left his room with a sentiment of sadness, perhaps even of alarm, which I reproach myself for causing you to share, although I cannot refrain from discussing it with you. This is the narrative of what passed: you may rest assured that it is a faithful one; for, if I were to live another eighty years, I should never forget the impression which this sad scene made upon me.

I visited my nephew this morning; I found him writing, surrounded by sundry heaps of papers which seemed to be the object of his labours. He was so busied that I was already in the middle of his chamber before he turned his head to discover who had entered. As soon as he recognized me, I noticed clearly that, on rising, he made an effort to compose his features, and it was this fact, perhaps, which further attracted my attention. In truth, he had made no toilette and wore no powder; but



I found him pale and wan, and, above all, of a changed expression. His glance, which we have known so gay and keen, was sad and downcast; in short, between ourselves, I should not have cared for you to see him thus; for he had a very pathetic air, and most fitting, I dare believe, to inspire that tender pity which is one of the most dangerous snares of love.

Although impressed by what I had noticed, I none the less commenced the conversation as though I had perceived nothing. I spoke to him first of his health; and, though he did not tell me that it was good, he nevertheless did not say that it was bad. Thereupon, I complained of his retirement, which had almost the air of a mania, and I tried to infuse a little gaiety into my mild reproof; but he only answered, in heartfelt accents, "It is one wrong the more, I confess; but it shall be retrieved with the rest." His expression, even more than his words, somewhat disturbed my playfulness, and I hastened to tell him that he attached too much importance to a mere friendly reproach.

We then commenced to talk quietly. He told me soon afterwards that perhaps an affair, *the most important affair of his life*, would shortly recall him to Paris: but as I was afraid of guessing it, my dearest fair, and feared lest this prologue should lead up to a confidence which I did not desire, I put no question to him, and contented myself with replying that a little more dissipation would benefit his health. I added that, this once, I would not press him to remain, as I loved my friends for themselves; at this simple expression, he grasped my hands, and, speaking with a vehemence which I cannot describe to you: "Yes, aunt," he said me, "love, love well a nephew who respects

and cherishes you; and, as you say, love him for himself. Do not grieve about his happiness, and do not trouble, with any regret, the eternal peace which he hopes soon to enjoy. Repeat to me that you love me, that you forgive me. Yes, you will forgive me, I know your goodness; but how can I hope for the same indulgence from those whom I have so greatly offended?" He then stooped over me to conceal, as I think, the signs of grief which, in spite of himself, the sound of his voice betrayed to me.

Moved more than I can say, I rose precipitately; and doubtless he noticed my alarm, for, at once growing more composed: "Pardon me," he resumed, "pardon me, Madame; I feel that I am wandering, in spite of my will. I beg you to forget my remarks, and only to remember my profound veneration. I shall not fail," he added, "to come and renew my respects to you before my departure." It seemed to me that this last sentence suggested that I should bring my visit to a conclusion, and I went away.

But the more I reflect upon it, the less can I guess what he wished to say. What is this affair, *the most important of his life?* On what ground does he ask my forgiveness? Whence that involuntary emotion when he spoke to me? I have already asked myself these questions a thousand times without being able to reply to them. I do not even see anything therein which relates to you: however, as the eyes of love are more clear-sighted than those of friendship, I was unwilling to leave you in ignorance of anything that passed between my nephew and myself.

I have made four attempts to finish this long letter, which would be longer still, were it not for the fatigue I feel. Adieu, my dearest fair.

At the Château de . . . , 25th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THIRD

THE PÈRE ANSELME TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

I HAVE had the honour of receiving your letter, M. le Vicomte; and yesterday I betook myself, in accordance with your wishes, to the person in question. I explained to her the object and the motives of the visit you had asked me to pay her. Determined as she was upon the prudent course which she had adopted at first, upon my pointing out to her that by a refusal she, perhaps, incurred a risk of putting an obstacle in the way of your happy return, and also of opposing, in some manner, the merciful decrees of Providence, she consented to receive your visit, always on condition that it shall be the last, and has charged me to tell you that she will be at home on Thursday next, the 28th. If this day should not be convenient to you, will you be so good as to inform her, and appoint another. Your letter will be received.

Meanwhile, M. le Vicomte, permit me to invite you not to delay, without grave reasons, in order that you may be able to abandon yourself the sooner and more entirely to the laudable dispositions which you display to me. Remember that he who hesitates to improve the moment of grace runs the risk of its being withdrawn from him; that, if the mercy of God is infinite, yet the use of it is

regulated by justice; and that a moment may come when the God of mercy shall turn into a God of vengeance.

If you continue to honour me with your confidence, I beg you to believe that all my attention shall be yours, as soon as you desire it: however greatly I may be busied, my most important business will ever be to fulfil the duties of my sacred office, to which I am peculiarly devoted, and the finest moment of my life will be that in which, by the blessing of the Almighty, I shall see my efforts prosper. Weak sinners that we are, we can do nothing by ourselves! But the God who recalls you can do all; and we shall owe alike to His bounty—you, the constant desire to be reconciled to Him, and I the means of being your guide. It is by His aid that I hope soon to convince you that Holy Religion alone can give, even in this world, that solid and durable happiness which in the blindness of human passions we seek in vain.

I have the honour to be, with respectful consideration, etc.

Paris, 25th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOURTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

IN the midst of the astonishment, in which the news I received yesterday has thrown me, Madame, I cannot forget the satisfaction which it must cause you, and I hasten to acquaint you with it. M. de Valmont is occupied neither with me nor with his love; he only would retrieve by a more edifying life the faults, or rather the errors, of his youth. I have been informed of this great event by the Père Anselme, to whom he applied for future direction, and also in order to contrive an interview with me, the principal object of which I judge to be the return of my letters, which he had hitherto retained, in spite of the request I had made him to the contrary.

Doubtless, I cannot but applaud this happy termination, and felicitate myself, if, as he states, I am in any way responsible for it. But why needed it that I should be the instrument, and why should it have cost me my life's repose? Could not M. de Valmont's happiness have been secured by any other means than my misery? Oh, my indulgent friend, forgive me this complaint! I know that it is not mine to question the decrees of God; but whilst I pray to Him ceaselessly, and always in vain, for strength to conquer my unhappy love, He lavishes it on one who has

not prayed for it, and leaves me without succour, utterly abandoned to my weakness.

But let me stifle this guilty plaint. Do I not know that the prodigal son on his return obtained more favour from his father than the son who had never been absent? What account have we to ask from Him who owes us nothing. And even were it possible that we had any rights before Him, what had been my own? Could I boast of a virtue that already I do but owe to Valmont? He has saved me, and how should I dare complain if I suffer for his sake! No, my sufferings will be dear to me, if his happiness is the price. Doubtless, it was needful for him to return to the common Father. The God who made him must have cherished His handiwork. He did not create this charming being only to be a reprobate. 'Tis for me to pay the penalty of my audacious imprudence; ought I not to have felt that, since it was forbidden me to love him, I ought never to have allowed myself to see him?

'Tis my fault or my misfortune that I held out too long against this truth. You are my witness, my dear and venerable friend, that I submitted to this sacrifice as soon as I recognized its necessity: but it just failed in being complete, in that M. de Valmont did not share it. Shall I confess to you that it is this idea which, at present, torments me most? Insufferable pride, which sweetens the ills we bear by the thought of those we inflict! Ah, I will conquer this rebellious heart, I will accustom myself to humiliations!

It is above all to obtain this result that I have at last consented to receive, on Thursday next, the painful visit of M. de Valmont. Then I shall hear him tell me himself that I am nothing to him; that the weak and fugitive



impression I had made upon him is entirely effaced! I shall see his gaze directed towards me without emotion, whilst the fear of betraying my own will make me lower my eyes. Those same letters which he refused so long to my repeated requests I shall receive from his indifference; he will give them up to me as useless things, which have no further interest for him; and my trembling hands, receiving this deposit of shame, will feel that it is given to them by a hand which is firm and tranquil! And then I shall see him depart from me . . . depart for ever; and my eyes, which will follow him, will not see his own look back to me!

And I have been reserved for so much humiliation! Ah, let me, at least, make use of it by allowing it to impregnate me with the sentiment of my weakness. . . . Yes, these letters, which he no longer cares to keep, I will religiously preserve. I will impose on myself the shame of reading them daily until the last traces of them are effaced by my tears; and his own I will burn as infected by the dangerous poison which has corrupted my soul. Oh, what is this love then, if it makes us regret even the risks to which it has exposed us; if one can be afraid of feeling it still, even when one no longer inspires it? Let us shun this dire passion, which leaves no choice betwixt misery or shame, nay, often unites them both: let prudence at least replace virtue.

How far away is Thursday still! Why can I not this instant consummate the grievous sacrifice, and forget at once its object and its cause! This visit troubles me; I repent of my promise of it. Alas! What need has he to see me again? What are we to one another now? If he has offended me, I forgive him. I congratulate him even

on his wish to repair his faults; I praise him for it. I will do more, I will imitate him; and I, who have been beguiled by like errors, shall be brought back by his example. But, since his intention is to flee from me, why does he begin by seeking me out? What is most urgent for either of us, is it not that each should forget the other? Doubtless that is so; and that, henceforth, shall be my sole care.

If you will permit me, my amiable friend, I will come to you in order to occupy myself with this arduous task. If I have need of succour, perhaps even of consolation, I will not receive it from any other than you. You alone know how to understand me and to speak to my heart. Your precious friendship shall fill my whole existence. Nothing shall seem too difficult for me to second the care that you must take of yourself. I shall owe you my tranquillity, my happiness, my virtue, and the fruit of your kindness to me will be that, at last, I shall become worthy of it.

I have written very wildly, I think, in this letter; I gather so, at least, from the trouble which has unceasingly harassed me whilst writing. If any sentiments occur in it at which I ought to blush, cover them with the indulgence of your friendship; I rely upon it entirely. It is not from you that I would hide any of the movements of my heart.

Adieu, my venerable friend. I hope, in a few days, to announce the day of my arrival.

Paris, 25th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

BEHOLD her vanquished then, this proud woman who dared to think she could resist me! Yes, my friend, she is mine, mine entirely; since yesterday there is nothing left for her to grant me.

I am still too full of my happiness to be able to appreciate it: but I am amazed at the unknown charm I have experienced. Can it be true, then, that virtue enhances the value of a woman even at the very moment of her fall? Nay, let us relegate this puerile notion with other old wives' tales. Does one not almost always encounter a more or less well-feigned resistance at a first triumph? And have I found elsewhere the charm of which I speak? Yet it is not that of love; for, after all, if I have sometimes had, with some astounding woman, moments of weakness which resembled that pusillanimous passion, I have always known how to overcome them and return to my principles. Even if the scene of yesterday had carried me, as I believe it did, somewhat further than I counted on; even if, for a moment, I shared the trouble and intoxication which I caused, that passing illusion would be dissipated by now: and nevertheless the same charm subsists. I should even find, I confess, a sweet enough pleasure in abandon-

ing myself to it, if it did not cause me some anxiety. Shall I be dominated at my age, like a school-boy, by an unknown and involuntary sentiment? Nay: I must before all combat it and understand it.

Perhaps, as far as that goes, I have already caught a glimpse of the cause! I am pleased with this idea, at any rate, and I would fain have it true.

In the crowd of women with whom I have hitherto played the part and performed the functions of lover, I had never yet met one who had not at least as much desire to give herself as I had to persuade her to it; I was even in the habit of calling those women prudes who did no more than meet me half-way, in contrast to so many others whose provocative defence did but imperfectly conceal the first advances they had made.

Here, on the contrary, I met with a preconceived unfavourable prejudice, which was subsequently strengthened by the advice and stories of a spiteful but clear-sighted woman; a natural and extreme timidity, fortified by an enlightened modesty; an attachment to virtue directed by religion, with already two years of victory to its account; finally, a vigorous course of conduct inspired by these different motives, which all had for their aim escape from my pursuit.

It is not then, as in my other adventures, a mere capitulation, more or less advantageous, whereof it is easier to take advantage than to be proud; it is a complete victory, purchased at the cost of a hard campaign, and determined by cunning manœuvres. 'Tis not surprising, then, that this success, due to myself alone, should seem all the more precious to me; and the excess of pleasure which I experienced when I triumphed, and which I feel still,

is no more than the sweet impression of the sentiment of glory. I cherish this point of view, which saves me from the humiliation of thinking that I can be in any manner dependent upon the slave whom I have subjected; that I do not possess in myself alone the plenitude of my happiness; and that the power of giving me the whole energy of pleasure should be reserved to such or such a woman, excluding all the others.

These deliberate reflexions shall regulate my conduct on this important occasion; and you may rest assured that I will not let myself be enchained to such a degree that I cannot always play with these new bonds and break them at my will. But I am talking to you already of my rupture, while you do not yet know the means by which I have acquired my rights: read then, and learn to what virtue is exposed when it seeks to succour folly. I studied so attentively my conversation and the replies I obtained that I hope to be able to repeat them to you with a precision that will delight you.

You will see from the copies of the two letters enclosed <sup>1</sup> what mediator I chose to reconcile me with my fair, and what zeal the holy personage employed to reunite us. One thing more I must tell you, which I learned from a letter intercepted in the usual way: the fear and the petty humiliation of being quitted had somewhat disturbed the austere Puritan's prudence, and had filled her head with sentiments which were none the less interesting because they were not common-sense. It was after these preliminaries, necessary for you to know, that yesterday, Thursday the twenty-eighth, the day settled and appointed by the

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<sup>1</sup> Letters the hundred and twentieth and hundred and twenty-second.

ingrate, I presented myself before her in the quality of a timid and repentant slave, to leave her crowned with victory.

It was six o'clock in the evening when I came to the fair recluse; for since her return her door has been shut to everyone. She attempted to rise when I was announced; but her trembling knees did not allow her to remain in this position: she immediately resumed her seat. She showed signs of impatience, because the servant who had introduced me had some task to perform in the apartment. We filled up the interval with the customary compliments. But, in order to waste no time, when moments were so precious, I carefully examined the locality; and at once my eye fixed upon the scene of my victory. I could have wished for one more suitable, although there was an ottoman in that very room. But I noticed that, facing it, was a portrait of the husband; and I confess that, with such a singular woman, I was afraid lest one haphazard glance in that direction should destroy the result of all my labours. At last, we were left alone and I broached the question.

After having explained, in a few words, that the Père Anselme must have informed her of the motives of my visit, I complained of the severe treatment I had been subject to, and dwelt particularly on the *scorn* which had been displayed me. She defended herself, as I expected; and, as you would expect yourself, I founded my proofs on the distrust and fear which I had inspired, on the scandalous flight which had ensued, her refusal to answer my letters, even to receive them, etc., etc. As she was commencing a justification which would have been very easy, I felt bound to interrupt her; and, to obtain pardon



for this brusque proceeding, I covered it at once with a flattery. "If so many charms," I went on, "have made so profound an impression on my heart, the effect of so many virtues has been no less upon my soul. Led away, no doubt, by my desire to approach them, I dared to deem myself worthy. I do not reproach you for having judged otherwise; but I am punished for my mistake." As she maintained an embarrassed silence, I continued:

"It was my wish, Madame, either to justify myself in your eyes, or to obtain from you pardon for the wrongs you suppose me to have committed; so that I can at least end, with a certain tranquillity, days to which I attach no more value since you have refused to embellish them."

Here, however, she endeavoured to reply:

"My duty did not permit me . . ." And the difficulty of completing the lie, which duty required, did not permit her to finish her phrase. I resumed, therefore, in a more tender tone: "Is it true that it is from me you have fled?" "My departure was necessary." "And that you drive me away from you?" "It must be so." "And for ever?" "I must." I have no need to tell you that, during this short dialogue, the voice of the gentle prude was oppressed, and that her eyes were not raised to mine.

I judged it my duty to give this languid scene a touch of animation; thus, rising with an air of vexation: "Your firmness," I then said, "restores to me all my own. Well, yes, Madame, we shall be separated even more than you think. And you may congratulate yourself at your leisure over the success of your handiwork." Somewhat surprised at this tone of reproach, she sought to reply: "The resolution you have taken . . ." said she. "It is but the result of my despair," I resumed with passion. "You

wished me to be unhappy; I will prove that you have succeeded even beyond your hopes." "I desire your happiness," she answered. And the sound of her voice began to announce a strong emotion. Casting myself, therefore, on my knees before her, and in that dramatic tone which you know is mine: "Ah, cruel one!" I cried. "Can any happiness exist for me in which you have no share? Where can I find it away from you? Ah, never, never!" I confess that, in abandoning myself to this extent, I had counted much on the support of tears; but, either from ill-disposition, or perhaps owing to the constant and painful attention I was giving to everything, it was impossible for me to weep.

Luckily I remembered that, in order to subjugate a woman, all means are equally good, and that it would be sufficient to astound her by some great change of manner in order to produce an impression at once favourable and profound. Thus, for the sensibility which proved lacking, I substituted terror; and for that, merely changing the inflexion of my voice, and keeping in the same posture, "Yes," I continued, "I make this vow at your feet, to possess you or die." As I uttered these last words, our eyes met. I know not what the timid creature saw, or thought she saw, in mine; but she rose with a terrified air, and escaped from the arm with which I had encircled her. It is true, I did nothing to retain her: for I had often remarked that scenes of despair rendered in too lively a key became ridiculous, if they were unduly prolonged, or left one only such really tragic resources as I was very far from wishing to take. However, whilst she withdrew from me, I added in a low and ominous whisper, but loud enough for her to hear me: "Well then, death!"

I then rose; and, after a moment's silence, cast upon her, as if at random, wild glances, which were none the less clear-sighted and observant for their distracted air. Her ill-assured attitude, her heavy breathing, the contraction of all her muscles, the half-raised position of her trembling arms, all gave sufficient proof to me that the effect was such as I had wished to produce: but, since, in love, nothing ever finishes except at close quarters, and we were still at some distance from one another, it became necessary before all things to draw together. It was in order to succeed in this, that I passed, as soon as possible, to an appearance of tranquillity, capable of calming the effects of so violent a condition, without weakening its impression.

This was my transition: "I am very miserable! It was my wish to live for your happiness, and I have troubled it. I devote myself for your peace, and I trouble it too . . . ." Then, with a composed, but constrained, air: "Forgive me, Madame; little accustomed as I am to the storms of passion, I know ill how to repress its movements. If I was wrong to abandon myself to them, at least remember 'tis for the last time. Ah, be calm, be calm, I conjure you!" And, during this long speech, I insensibly drew nearer. "If you would have me be calm," replied the frightened fair, "pray be more tranquil yourself." "Ah, well! yes, I promise you," said I. I added, in a fainter voice, "If the effort be great, at least it is not for long. But," I continued, with a distraught air, "I came, did I not, to return you your letters? For mercy's sake, deign to take them back. This sorrowful sacrifice remains for me to perform; leave me naught which may tend to diminish my courage." And, drawing the precious collection from my pocket: "Behold," said I, "the deceitful receptacle

of your assurances of friendship! It bound me to life: take it back from me. Give me thus, yourself, the signal which must separate me from you for ever...."

Here, my timorous mistress gave way entirely to her tender concern: "But, M. de Valmont, what is the matter with you, and what is it you would say? Is not the step which you took yesterday a voluntary one? Is it not the fruit of your own reflexions? And are they not the same which led you yourself to approve the inevitable course which duty has made me adopt?" "Well, then," I answered, "that course is responsible for my own." "And what is that?" "The only one which, while it separates me from you, can put an end to my pain." "But answer me, what is it?" Here I clasped her in my arms, nor did she defend herself in any way; and, judging from this forgetfulness of the proprieties how strong and potent was her emotion: "Adorable creature," said I, risking a little enthusiasm, "you have no conception of the love which you inspire in me; you will never know to what an extent you were adored, and how much dearer this sentiment was to me than existence! May all your days be calm and fortunate; may they be adorned with all the happiness which you have ravished from me! Reward this sincere prayer by a regret, a tear at least; believe that the last sacrifice which I shall make will not be the most grievous to my heart. Farewell!"

Whilst I spoke thus, I felt her heart throbbing violently; I observed the changed expression of her face; I saw, above all, that her tears were choking her and yet were few and painful in their flow. It was not till then that I resolved to feign departure; when, retaining me forcibly: "Nay, listen to me," she said quickly. "Leave me," I







M<sup>lle</sup>. Gerard del.

Bertaux et Dupriol sculp.



answered. "You *shall* listen to me; it is my wish." "I must flee from you, I must!" "No," she cried....

At this last word she flung herself, or rather fell swooning into my arms. As I was still doubtful of so fortunate a success, I feigned the utmost alarm; but, alarmed as I was, I led her, or carried her, to the spot I had originally fixed upon as the field of my triumph; and in truth she did not return to herself until she was submissive and already abandoned to her happy conqueror.

Thus far, my lovely friend, you will find, I believe, a purity of method which will give you pleasure, and you will see that I departed in nothing from the true principles of that war which, as we have often remarked, so strongly resembles the real war. Judge me then as though I had been Frederic or Turenne. I was forced to combat an enemy who would do nothing but temporize; by scientific manœuvres I obtained the choice of positions and of the field; I was able to inspire the enemy with confidence, in order the more easily to catch up with him in his retreat; I was able to add terror to this feeling before the fight was engaged; I left nothing to chance, except in my consideration of a great advantage in case of success, and the certainty of resources in case of defeat; in short, I did not engage until I had an assured retreat, by which I could cover and preserve all that I had previously conquered. That is, I believe, all that one can do: but I am afraid, at present, lest, like Hannibal, I may be enervated by the delights of Capua. Now for what has passed since.

I fully expected that such a great event would not be accomplished without the customary tears and despair; and,

if I noticed at first somewhat more confusion and a sort of shrinking, I attributed both to the character of the prude: thus, without concerning myself with these slight differences, which I thought purely local, I simply followed the highroad of consolation, thoroughly persuaded that, as happens ordinarily, sensations would assist sentiment, and that a single action would do more than any speech, which last, however, I did not neglect. But I met with a really alarming resistance, less indeed from its excessive character than from the form under which it was displayed.

Imagine a woman seated, of an immovable rigour, and an unchanging face; having the air neither of thinking, hearing nor understanding; whose fixed eyes give issue to a continuous stream of tears, which fall, however, without an effort. Such was Madame de Tourvel, whilst I was speaking; but, if I tried to recall her attention to me by a caress, by even the most innocent gesture, this apparent apathy was at once succeeded by terror, gasping for breath, convulsions, sobs and, at intervals, cries, but with not an articulate word.

These cries were resumed several times, and always more loudly; the last even was so violent that I was entirely discouraged by it, and feared for a moment that I had won a useless victory. I fell back upon the customary commonplaces; and, amongst their number, found this one: "And you are in despair because you have made my happiness?" At this word, the adorable woman turned towards me; and her face, although still rather wild, had, nevertheless, resumed already its celestial expression. "Your happiness!" she said. You can guess my answer. "You are happy then?" I redoubled my protestations. "And happy through me!" I joined praises and tender

speeches. Whilst I was speaking, all her limbs grew supple; she sank down languorously, leaning back in her arm-chair; and yielding to me a hand which I had ventured to take: "I feel," said she, "that that idea consoles and relieves me."

You may judge that, thus shown the way, I no longer left it; it was really the right and, perhaps, the only one. So that, when I would fain attempt a second success, I met, at first, with a certain resistance, and what had passed before rendered me circumspect: but, having summoned this same idea of my happiness to my aid, I soon perceived its favourable effects: "You are right;" the tender creature said to me, "I can no longer support my existence, except in so far as it may serve to render you happy. I devote myself entirely to that: from this moment, I give myself to you, and you shall meet, on my side, neither with refusals nor regrets." It was with this candour, naive or sublime, that she abandoned to me her person and her charms, and enhanced my happiness by participating in it. The intoxication was reciprocal and complete; and for the first time mine survived the pleasure. I only left her arms to fall at her knees and swear an eternal love to her; and, to tell the whole truth, I believed what I said. And, even after we had separated, the idea of her never left me, and I was obliged to make an effort in order to distract myself.

Ah, why are you not here at least to counterbalance the charm of the action by that of the reward? But I shall lose nothing by waiting, is not that so? And I hope I may consider as settled the happy arrangement which I proposed to you in my last letter. You see that I fulfil my word, and that, as I promised you, my affairs will be sufficiently

advanced to enable me to give you a portion of my time. Hasten then to dismiss your heavy Belleruche, and leave the mawkish Danceny where he is, to occupy yourself only with me. But what are you doing so long in the country, that you do not even answer me? Do you know that I should like to scold you? But happiness tends to indulgence. And then I do not forget that, in entering once more the ranks of your adorers, I submit anew to your little fantasies. Remember, however, that the new lover will lose no whit of the former rights of a friend.

Adieu, as of old . . . . Yes, *adieu my angel! I send thee all the kisses of love.*

P.S. Do you know that Prévan, after his month of prison, has been obliged to leave his regiment? It is the news of all Paris to-day. Truly, he is cruelly punished for a sin which he did not commit, and your success is complete!

Paris, 29th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SIXTH

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

I SHOULD have replied to you before, my amiable child, if the fatigue consequent on my last letter had not brought back my pains, which have once more deprived me during these last days of the use of my arm. I was most anxious to thank you for the good news which you have given me of my nephew, and I was no less eager to offer you my sincere congratulations on your own count. One is forced to recognize in this a real effect of Providence, which, by touching the heart of one, has also saved the other. Yes, my dearest fair, God, who only wished to try you, has succoured you at a moment when your strength was exhausted; and, in spite of your little murmur, you owe Him, methinks, your thanksgiving. It is not that I do not feel that it would have been more agreeable to you, if this resolution had come to you first, and that Valmont's had been only the consequence of it; it seems even, humanly speaking, that the rights of our sex would have been better preserved, and we would not lose any of them! But what are these slight considerations in view of the important objects which have been obtained? Does a man who has been saved from shipwreck complain that he has not had a choice of means?

You will soon find, my dear daughter, that the sorrow which you dread will alleviate itself; and, even if it were to subsist for ever and in its entirety, you would none the less feel that it was still easier to endure than remorse for crime and contempt of yourself. It would have been useless for me to speak to you earlier with this apparent severity: love is an involuntary sentiment which prudence can avoid, but which it could not vanquish, and which, once born, dies only by its fine death, or from the absolute lack of hope. It is this last case, in which you are, which gives me the courage and the right to tell you frankly my opinion. It is cruel to alarm one hopelessly sick, who is no longer susceptible to aught save consolations and palliation; but it is right to enlighten a convalescent as to the dangers he has incurred, in order to inspire him with that prudence of which he has need, and with submission to counsels which may still be necessary to him.

Since you choose me for your physician, it is as such that I speak to you, and that I tell you that the little indisposition which you experience at present, and which perhaps demands some remedies, is nothing in comparison with the alarming malady from which your recovery is assured. Next, as your friend, as the friend of a reasonable and virtuous woman, I will permit myself to add that this passion, which has subjugated you, already so unfortunate in itself, became even more so through its object. If I am to believe what is told me, my nephew, whom I confess I love, perhaps to weakness, and who, indeed, unites many laudable qualities to many attractions, is not without danger for women; there are women whom he has wronged, and he sets almost an equal price upon



their seduction and their ruin. Indeed, I believe that you may have converted him. Never was there a person more worthy to do this: but so many others have flattered themselves with the same thought, and their hopes have been deceived, that I love better far to think you should not be reduced to this resource.

Consider now, my dearest fair, that instead of the many risks you would have had to run, you will have, besides the repose of your conscience and your own peace of mind, the satisfaction of having been the principal cause of Valmont's happy reformation. For myself, I do not doubt but that this is, in large part, the result of your courageous resistance, and that a moment of weakness on your part might have left my nephew, perhaps, in eternal error. I love to think so, and desire to see you think the same; you will find in that your first consolations, and I, fresh reasons for loving you more.

I expect you here within a few days, my amiable daughter, as you have announced. Come and recover calm and happiness in the same spot where you had lost it; come, above all, to rejoice with your fond mother that you have so happily kept the word you gave her, to do nothing unworthy of her or of yourself!

At the Château de . . , 30th October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVENTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

IF I have not replied to your letter of the 19th, Vicomte, it is not that I have not had the time; it is quite simply that it put me in a bad humour, and that I found it lacking in common-sense. I thought, therefore, that I could not do better than leave it in oblivion: but, since you come back to it, since you appear to cling to the ideas it contains, and take my silence for consent, I must tell you plainly what I think.

I may sometimes have had the pretension to replace in my single person a whole seraglio; but it has never suited me to make a part of one. I thought you knew this. Now, at least, when you can no longer be ignorant of it, you will easily imagine how absurd your proposal must have appeared to me. I indeed! I am to sacrifice a fancy, and a fresh fancy moreover, in order to occupy myself with you! And to occupy myself in what way? By awaiting my turn, like a submissive slave, for the sublime favours of *Your Highness!* When, forsooth, you want a moment's distraction from *that unknown charm* which *the adorable, the celestial* Madame de Tourvel has alone made you experience, or when you are afraid of compromising, in the eyes of *the seductive Cécile*, the su-

perior idea which it is your good pleasure that she should preserve of you: then, condescending even to myself, you will come in search of pleasures, less keen in truth, but without consequence; and your precious bounties, although somewhat rare, will, nevertheless, suffice for my happiness!

You, certainly, are rich in your good opinion of yourself: but, apparently, I am not equally so in modesty; for however I may look at myself, I cannot find myself reduced to such a point. Perhaps this is a fault of mine; but I warn you I have many others also.

I have, in especial, that of believing that the *school-boy*, the *marvish* Danceny, who is solely occupied with me, and sacrifices to me, without making a merit of it, a first passion, even before it has been satisfied, who, in a word, loves me as one loves at his age, may work more effectively than you, for all his twenty years, to secure my happiness and my pleasure. I will even permit myself to add that, if it were my whim to give him an assistant, it would not be you, at any rate not at this moment.

And for what reasons, do you ask me? But, to begin with, there might very well be none: for the caprice which might make me prefer you could equally cause your exclusion. However, I am quite willing, out of politeness, to give you the reason of my opinion. It seems to me that you would have too many sacrifices to make me; and I, instead of being grateful for them, as you would not fail to expect, should be capable of believing that you were still my debtor! You quite see that, far as we are from each other in our fashion of thinking, we cannot come together again in any manner: and I am afraid that it might need time, a long time, before I should change

my sentiments. When I am converted, I promise I will inform you. Until then, believe me, make other arrangements, and keep your kisses; you have so many better occasions to dispose of them!...

*Adieu, as of old*, say you? But of old, it seems to me, you took a little more account of me; you had not relegated me entirely to minor parts; and, above all, you were quite willing to wait until I had said yes, before making sure of my consent. Be satisfied then, if instead of bidding you also adieu as of old, I bid you adieu as at present.

Your servant, M. le Vicomte.

At the Château de . . . , 31st October, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-EIGHTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I ONLY received yesterday, Madame, your tardy reply. It would have killed me on the instant, if my existence had still been in my own hands; but another is its possessor, and that other is M. de Valmont. You see that I hide nothing from you. If you must consider me no longer worthy of your friendship, I fear even less to lose it than to retain it by guile. All that I can tell you is that, placed by M. de Valmont between his death or his happiness, I resolved in favour of the latter. I neither vaunt myself on this, nor accuse myself; I simply state the fact.

You will easily understand, after this, what impression your letter must have made upon me, with the severe truths which it contains. Do not believe, however, that it was able to give birth to a regret in me, nor that it can ever cause me to change in sentiment or in conduct. It is not that I do not have cruel moments: but when I fear that I can no longer endure my torments, I say to myself: Valmont is happy; and all vanishes before this idea, or rather it converts all into pleasures.

It is to your nephew then that I have devoted myself; it is for him that I have ruined myself. He has become the one centre of my thoughts, my sentiments,

my actions. As long as my life is necessary to his happiness, it will be precious to me, and I shall deem it fortunate. If some day he thinks differently.... he shall hear from me neither complaint nor reproach. I have already dared to cast my eyes upon that fatal moment; and I have resolved on my course.

You see, now, how little I need be affected by the fear you seem to have, lest one day M. de Valmont should ruin me: for, ere he can wish for that, he will have ceased to love me; and what will then be vain reproaches to me which I shall not hear? He alone shall be my judge. As I shall have lived but for him, it will be in him that my memory shall repose; and if he is forced to admit that I loved him, I shall be sufficiently justified.

You have now read, Madame, in my heart. I preferred the misfortune of losing your esteem by my frankness to that of rendering myself unworthy of it by the degradation of a lie. I thought I owed this complete confidence to the kindness you have shewn me. To add one word more would be to lead you to suspect that I have the vanity to count upon it still, when, on the contrary, I do myself justice in ceasing to pretend to it.

I am with respect, Madame, your most humble and obedient servant.

Paris, 1st November, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-NINTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

TELL me then, my lovely friend, whence comes the tone of bitterness and banter which prevails in your last letter? Pray, what crime have I committed, apparently without suspecting it, which put you in such ill-humour? You reproach me with having the air of counting on your consent before I had obtained it: but I believed that what might seem presumption in the case of everybody could never be taken, between you and me, for ought save confidence: and since when has that sentiment done detriment to friendship or to love? In uniting hope to desire, I did but yield to the natural impulse which makes us ever place the happiness we seek as near to us as possible; and you took for the effect of pride what was no more than the result of my eagerness. I know mighty well that custom has introduced in such a case a respectful doubt: but you also know that it is but a form, a mere protocol; and I was authorized, it seems to me, to believe that these minute precautions were no longer necessary between us.

Methinks, even, that this free and frank method, when it is founded on an old *liaison*, is far preferable to the insipid flattery which so often takes the relish out of love. Perhaps, moreover, the value which I find in this manner

does but come from that which I attach to the happiness which it recalls to me: but, for that very cause, it would be more painful still for me to see you judge of it otherwise.

That, however, is the only error which I am conscious of; for I do not imagine that you could have thought seriously that there existed any woman in the world whom I could prefer to you, and, even less, that I could appreciate you so ill as you feign to believe. You have looked at yourself, you tell me, in this connection, and you have not found yourself reduced to such a point. I well believe it, and it proves that you have a faithful mirror. But could you not have drawn the conclusion, with more ease and justice, that I was very certain not to have judged you so?

I seek in vain for a cause for this strange idea. It seems, however, that it is due, more or less, to the praises I have permitted myself to make of other women. At least I infer it, from your affectation of picking out the epithets *adorable, celestial, seductive*, which I made use of in speaking to you of Madame de Tourvel or of the little Volanges. But are you not aware that these words, more often used by chance than from reflexion, are less expressive of the account one takes of the person than of the situation in which one finds one's self at the time of speaking? And if, at the very moment when I was keenly affected either by one or the other, I was none the less desirous of you; if I showed you a marked preference over both of them; since, in short, I could not renew our former *liaison*, except to the prejudice of the two others, I do not find in that so great a matter for reproach.

It will be no more difficult for me to justify myself as to *the unknown charm* with which you seem to be also somewhat shocked: for, to begin with, it does not result that it is

stronger from the fact that it is unknown. Ah, who could give it the palm over the delicious pleasures which you alone know how to render always fresh, as they are always keen? I did but wish to tell you, therefore, that it was of a kind which I had not experienced before, but I did not pretend to assign a class to it; and I added what I repeat to-day, that, whatever it may be, I shall know how to combat and to conquer it. I shall bring even more zeal to this, if I can see in this trivial task a homage to be offered to you.

As for the little Cécile, I think it hardly necessary to speak of her to you. You have not forgotten that it was at your request that I charged myself with the child, and I only await your permission to be rid of her. I may have remarked upon her ingenuousness and freshness; I may even, for a moment, have thought her *seductive*, because, in a more or less degree, one always take pleasure in one's own handiwork; but, assuredly, she is not in any way of sufficient consequence to fix one's attention upon her.

And now, my lovely friend, I appeal to your justice, to your first kindness for me, to the long and perfect friendship, the entire confidence which has since welded the bonds between us: have I deserved the severe tone which you adopt with me? But how easy it will be for you to compensate me for it when you like! Say but one word, and you will see whether all the charms and all the seductions will detain me here, not for a day, but for a minute. I will fly to your feet and into your arms, and I will prove to you a thousand times, and in a thousand manners, that you are, that you will ever be the true sovereign of my heart.

Adieu, my lovely friend; I await your reply with much eagerness.

Paris, 3rd November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

AND why, my dearest fair, would you cease to be my child? Why do you seem to announce to me that all correspondence will cease between us? Is it to punish me for not having guessed what was against all probability; or do you suspect me of having guided you wilfully? Nay, I know your heart too well to believe that it can think thus of mine. The pain, therefore, which your letter caused me is far less relative to me than to yourself!

O my youthful friend! I tell it you with sorrow: you are far too worthy of being loved that ever love should make you happy. Ah! what woman who was truly delicate and sensitive has not found misfortune in this very sentiment which promised her so much felicity! Do men know how to appreciate the woman they possess?

'Tis not that many are not honourable in their actions, and constant in their affections: but, even amongst these, how few know how to put themselves in unison with our hearts! Do not suppose, my dear child, that their love is like our own. Indeed, they experience the same intoxication, often even they bring more ardour to it; but they do not know that anxious eagerness, that delicate solicitude, which causes in us those tender and constant

cares of which the beloved object is ever the single aim. The man's pleasure lies in the happiness which he feels, the woman's in that which she bestows. This difference, so essential and so little noticed, has, however, a very sensible influence on the sum of their respective conduct. The pleasure of the one is ever to gratify his desires; that of the other is, especially, to arouse them. To please, with him, is but a means to success; whereas, with her, it is success itself. And coquetry, with which women are so often reproached, is nothing else than the abuse of this manner of feeling, and by that very fact proves its reality. In short, that exclusive taste, which particularly characterizes love, is in the man naught but a preference, serving at the most to enhance a pleasure which, perhaps, another object would diminish, but would not destroy; whilst in women it is a profound sentiment, which not only destroys every extraneous desire, but which, stronger than nature, and removed from its dominion, allows them to experience only repugnance and disgust at the very point where pleasure seems to be born.

And do not deem that more or less numerous exceptions, which one might quote, can successfully contradict these general truths. They are guaranteed by the public voice, which has distinguished infidelity from inconstancy for men alone; a distinction by which they prevail when they should be humiliated, and which, for our sex, has never been adopted save by those depraved women who are its shame, and to whom all means seem good which they hope can save them from the painful feeling of their baseness.

I had thought, my dearest fair, that it might be of use to you to have these reflexions to oppose to the chimerical ideas of perfect happiness with which love never fails to

abuse our imagination: the lying spirit, to which one still clings even when forced to abandon it, and the loss of which irritates and multiplies the sorrows, already too real, that are inseparable from a lively passion! This task of alleviating your pains, or of diminishing their number, is the only one I would fulfil at this moment. In disorders without remedy it is to the regimen alone that advice can be applied. The only thing I ask of you is to remember that to pity a sick person is not to blame him. Who are we, pray, that any of us should blame another? Let us leave the right to judge to Him alone who reads in our hearts, and I even dare believe that, in His paternal sight, a host of virtues may redeem a single weakness.

But I conjure you, my dear friend, guard yourself above all from those violent resolutions which are less a proof of strength than of entire discouragement: do not forget that, in rendering another possessor of your existence, to employ your own expression, it is not in your power to deprive your friends of the part of it which they previously possessed and will never cease to reclaim.

Adieu, my dear daughter; think sometimes of your affectionate mother, and believe that you will ever be, and above all else, the object of her dearest thoughts.

At the Château de . . . , 4th November, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIRST

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

'Tis well done, Vicomte, and I am better pleased with you this time than the last; but now, let us talk in all friendship, and I hope to convince you that, for you as for myself, the arrangement which you appear to desire would be a veritable piece of madness.

Have you not yet remarked that pleasure, which is, in effect, the sole motive of the union of the two sexes, does not, nevertheless, suffice to form a *liaison* between them; and that, if it is preceded by the desire which attracts, it is no less followed by the disgust which repels? 'Tis a law of nature which love alone can change; and love: does one have it when one wills? Yet one needs it ever; and it would be really too embarrassing, if one had not discovered that it happily suffices if it exists only on one side. The difficulty has thus been rendered less by one half, even without much being lost thereby; in fact, the one derives pleasure from the happiness of loving, the other from that of pleasing, which is a little less keen indeed, but to which is added the pleasure of deceiving; that sets up an equilibrium, and everything is arranged.

But tell me, Vicomte, which of us two will undertake to deceive the other? You know the story of the two

sharpers, who recognized each other while playing: "We shall make nothing," said they, "let us divide the cost of the cards;" and they gave up the game. We had best follow, believe me, their prudent example, and not lose time together which we can so well employ elsewhere.

To prove to you that in this I am influenced as much by your interests as my own, and that I am acting neither from ill-humour nor caprice, I do not refuse you the price agreed upon between us: I feel perfectly that each of us will suffice to the other for one night; and I do not even doubt but that we should know too well how to adorn it, not to see it end with regret. But do not let us forget that this regret is necessary to happiness; and, however sweet be our illusion, let us not believe that it can be lasting.

You see that I am meeting you in my turn, and even before you have yet set yourself right with me: for, after all, I was to have the first letter of the celestial prude; however, whether because you still cling to it, or because you have forgotten the conditions of a bargain which interests you, perhaps, less than you would fain have me believe, I have received nothing, absolutely nothing. Yet, unless I make a mistake, the tender Puritan must write frequently; else what would she do when she is alone? Surely she has not wit enough to distract herself? I could have, then, did I wish, some slight reproaches to make you; but I pass them over in silence, in consideration of a little temper that I showed, perhaps, in my last letter.

Now, Vicomte, it only remains for me to make one request of you, and this is again as much for your sake as my own; it is to postpone a moment which I desire,

perhaps, as much as you, but the date of which must, I think, be deferred until my return to town. On the one hand, we should not find the necessary freedom here; and, on the other, I should incur some risk: for it needs but a little jealousy to attach this tedious Beller Roche more closely than ever to my side, although he now only holds by a thread. He is already driven to exert himself in order to love me; to such a degree at present that I put as much malice as prudence into the caresses which I lavish on him. But at the same time you can see that this would not be a sacrifice to make to you! A reciprocal infidelity will render the charm far more potent.

Do you know I regret sometimes that we are reduced to these resources! In the days when we loved—for I believe it was love—I was happy; and you, Vicomte! . . . But why be longer concerned with a happiness which cannot return? Nay, say what you will, such a return is impossible. First, I should require sacrifices which, assuredly, you could not or would not make, and which, like enough, I do not deserve; and then, how is it possible to fix you? Oh, no, no. I will not even occupy myself with the idea; and, in spite of the pleasure which I derive at the present moment from writing to you, I far prefer to leave you abruptly.

Adieu, Vicomte.

At the Château de . . . , 6th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SECOND

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

DEEPLY touched, Madame, with your kindness to me, I would abandon myself entirely to it, were I not prevented in some sort from accepting it by the fear of profaning it. Why must it be that, while I see it to be so precious, I feel at the same time that I am no longer worthy of it! Ah! I will at least venture to express to you my gratitude; I will admire above all that indulgent virtue which only knows our frailties to compassionate them, and whose potent charm preserves so soft and strong an empire over hearts, even by the side of the charm of love.

But can I still deserve a friendship which no longer suffices for my happiness? I say the same of your counsels: I feel their worth, but I cannot follow them. And how should I not believe in a perfect happiness, when I experience it at this moment? Yes, if men are such as you say, we ought to shun them; but then Valmont is so far from resembling them! If, like them, he has that violence of passion which you call ardour, how far it is surpassed by his delicacy. O my friend! You talk of sharing my troubles; take a part, then, in my happiness; I owe it to love, and how greatly does the object enhance its value. You love your nephew, you say, perhaps, foolishly.

Ah, if you did but know him as I do! I love him with idolatry, and, even so, far less than he deserves. He may, doubtless, have been led astray by certain errors; he admits it himself; but who ever knew true love as he does? What more can I say to you? He feels it as he inspires it.

You will think that this is *one of those chimerical ideas with which love never fails to abuse our imagination*: but, in that case, why should he have become more tender, more ardent, when he has nothing further to obtain? I will confess, before, I found in him an air of reflexion, of reserve, which rarely abandoned him, and which often reminded me, in spite of myself, of the cruel and false impressions which had been given me of him. But, since he has been able to abandon himself without constraint to the movements of his heart, he seems to guess all the desires of mine. Who knows if we were not born for each other! If this happiness was not reserved for me, of being necessary to his! Ah, if it is an illusion, let me die, then, before it comes to an end. But no; I am fain to live to cherish, to adore him. Why should he cease to love me? What other woman could he render happier than me? And I feel, from my own experience, that the happiness one arouses is the strongest tie, the only one which really attaches. Yes, it is this delicious sentiment which ennobles love, which purifies it in some sort, and makes it worthy of a tender and generous soul, such as Valmont's.

Adieu, my dear, my venerable, my indulgent friend. It is in vain that I would write to you at greater length: here is the hour at which he has promised to come. Forgive me! But you wish me happiness, and, at this moment, it is so great that I can scarcely support it.

Paris, 7th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-THIRD

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

WHAT, then, my lovely friend, are those sacrifices which you deem I would not make for you, the reward of which, however, would be to please you? Let me only know them, and if I hesitate to offer them to you, I permit you to refuse the homage. Pray, what opinion have you conceived of me of late, if even in your indulgence you doubt my sentiments or my energy? Sacrifices which I would not or could not make! You think, then, that I am in love and subjugated? And you suspect me of having attached to the person the price which I set upon success? Ah, thank Heaven, I am not yet reduced to that, and I offer to prove it to you. Yes, I will prove it to you, even if it should be at Madame de Tourvel's expense. After that, assuredly, you can have no further doubt.

I have been able, without compromising myself, to devote some time to a woman who has, at least, the merit of being of a sort that is rarely met with. Perhaps, moreover, the dead season at which this adventure befell, caused me to abandon myself more to it; and, even now, when the great current has scarcely begun to flow, it is not surprising that it should almost entirely occupy me. But remember, please, that it is scarce eight days since I



culled the fruits of three months' labour. I have often dallied longer with what was of much less value and had not cost me so much!... And never did you draw a conclusion from it to my prejudice.

Besides, would you like to know the true cause of the zeal I am bringing to bear upon it? I will tell you. This woman is naturally timid; at first she doubted incessantly of her happiness, and this doubt sufficed to trouble it: so much so that I am only just beginning to see the extent of my power in this direction. Yet it was a thing I was curious to know; and the occasion is not so readily offered as you may think.

To begin with, for many women pleasure is always pleasure, and never aught else; and in the sight of these, whatever the title with which they adorn us, we are never more than factors, mere commissioners, whose activity is all our merit, and amongst whom he who does the most is always he who does best.

In another class, perhaps nowadays the most numerous, the celebrity of the lover, the pleasure of having carried him off from a rival, the fear of being robbed of him in turn, absorb the women almost entirely: we count, indeed, more or less, for something in the kind of enjoyment they obtain; but it depends more on the circumstances than on the person: it comes to them through us and not from us.

I needed, then, for the purposes of my observation, to find a delicate and sensitive woman, who made love her sole affair, and who in love itself saw only her lover; whose emotions, far from following the common road, ever started from the heart to reach the senses; whom I have seen, for instance (and I do not speak of the first day),

rise from the moment of enjoyment in despair, and a moment later recover pleasure in a word which was responsive to her soul. Last, she must unite to all this that natural candour, grown insurmountable by force of habit, which would not permit her to dissimulate the least sentiment of her heart. Now you will admit, such women are rare; and I dare believe that, failing this one, I should never, perhaps, have met another. It should not be surprising therefore, that she should hold me longer than another; and if the trouble that I take with her makes her happy, perfectly happy, why should I refuse it, especially as it pleases me instead of being disagreeable to me? But, because the mind is engaged, does it follow that the heart is caught? Certainly not. Nor will the value which I admit I set upon this adventure prevent me from embarking on others, or even from sacrificing it to some more agreeable one.

I am free to such an extent that I have not even neglected the little Volanges, whom, nevertheless, I hold so cheap. Her mother brings her back to town in three days; and yesterday I assured my communications; a little money to the porter, a few compliments to his wife, did the business. Can you conceive that Danceny never thought of this simple method? And then they tell us that love creates ingenuity! On the contrary, it stupefies those whom it enslaves. Shall not I, then, know how to defend myself from it? Ah, you may be easy. Already, in a few days, I am about to weaken the impression, too lively perhaps, which I have experienced, by dividing it; and, if a simple division will not do, I will multiply them.

I shall be none the less ready to restore the little school-girl to her discreet lover as soon as you think proper.

It seems to me that you have no longer any motive for preventing it; and I consent to do poor Danceny this signal service. 'Tis in truth, the least I can do in return for those he has done me. He is, at present, in the greatest anxiety to discover whether he will be received at Madame de Volanges'; I calm him, to the utmost of my power, by assuring him that I will contrive his happiness on an early occasion; and, in the meantime, I continue to charge myself with the correspondence which he means to resume on the arrival of *his Cécile*. I have already six letters from him, and I shall, certainly, have one or two more before the happy day. The lad must have mighty little to do!

But let us leave this childish couple and return to ourselves, so that I may occupy myself exclusively with the sweet hope your letter gave me. Yes, without a doubt you will hold me, and I would not pardon you for doubting it. Pray, have I ever ceased to be constant to you? Our bonds have been relaxed, but never broken; our pretended rupture was only an error of our imagination. Our sentiments, our interests remained none the less united. Like the traveller who returns in disillusion, I will confess that I deserted happiness to run after hope; and will say with d'Harcourt:

"The more strange lands I saw, I loved my country more." <sup>1</sup>

Please, then, oppose no longer the idea, or rather the sentiment, which restores you to me; and, after having tasted all the pleasures, in our different courses, let us enjoy

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<sup>1</sup> "*Plus je vis d'étrangers, plus j'aimai ma patrie*". Du Belloi's tragedy of *Le Siège de Calais*.

the happiness of feeling that none of them is comparable with that which we had of old, and which we shall find more delicious still.

Adieu, my charming friend. I consent to await your return; but hasten it, I pray you, and do not forget how greatly I desire it.

Paris, 8th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOURTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT.

TRULY, Vicomte, you are like the children, before whom one cannot say a word, and to whom one can show nothing because they would at once lay hold of it! A bare idea which comes to me, upon which I warned you even that I was not settled—because I speak of it to you, you take advantage of it to recall my attention to it when I am seeking to forget it, and to make me, in a measure, participate, in spite of myself, in your headstrong desires! Is it generous, pray, to leave me to support the whole burden of prudence alone? I tell you again, and repeat it more often to myself, the arrangement which you suggest is really impossible. Even if you were to include all the generosity you display at this moment, do you suppose that I have not my delicacy also, or that I should be ready to accept sacrifices which would be harmful to your happiness?

Now is it not true, Vicomte, that you are under an illusion as to the sentiment which attaches you to Madame de Tourvel? It is love, or love has never existed: you deny it in a hundred fashions, but you prove it in a thousand. What, for instance, of that subterfuge you employ towards yourself (for I believe you to be sincere with me), which makes you ascribe to curiosity the desire

which you can neither conceal nor overcome of retaining this woman? Would not one say that you had never made any other woman happy, perfectly happy? Ah, if you doubt that, you have but a poor memory! Nay, it is not that. Quite simply, your heart imposes on your intelligence, and is rewarded with bad arguments: but I, who have great interest in not being deceived by them, am not so easily satisfied.

Thus, while remarking your politeness, which has made you rigorously suppress all the words which you imagined had displeased me, I saw, nevertheless, that, perhaps without taking notice of it, you none the less retained the same ideas. 'Tis true, it is no longer the adorable, the celestial Madame de Tourvel; but it is *an astounding woman, a delicate and sensitive woman*, even to the exclusion of all others; in short *a rare woman* and such that *you would never have met another*. It is the same with that unknown charm, which is not *the strongest*. Well, so be it: but, since you had never found it before, it is easy to believe that you would be no more likely to find it in the future, and the loss you would incur would be none the less irreparable. Either these are certain symptoms of love, Vicomte, or we must renounce all hope of ever finding any.

Rest assured that this time I am speaking to you without temper. I have promised I will no more indulge in it; I recognized too clearly that it might become a dangerous snare. Believe me, let us be no more than friends, and let us be content with that. Only do justice to my courage in defending myself: yes, my courage; for one has sometimes need of it, if it be only to refrain from taking a course which one feels to be a bad one.



It is only, then, in order to bring you to my opinion by persuasion that I am going to answer the question you put as to the sacrifices which I should exact, and which you could not make. I employ the word *exact* expressly, for I am very sure that, in a moment, you will, indeed, find me over exacting: so much the better! Far from being annoyed at your refusal, I shall thank you for it. Come, it is not with you that I care to dissimulate, although, perhaps, I had need do so.

I would exact then—observe my cruelty!—that this rare, this astounding Madame de Tourvel should become no more to you than an ordinary woman, merely a woman such as she is: for you must not deceive yourself; the charm which you think to find in others exists in us, and it is love alone which so embellishes the beloved object. What I now require, impossible as it may be, you would, perhaps, make a grand effort to promise me, to swear it even; but I confess, I should put no faith in empty words. I could only be convinced by the whole tenor of your conduct.

Nor is that even all: I should be capricious. The sacrifice of the little Cécile, which you offer me with so good a grace, I should not care about at all. I should ask you, on the contrary, to continue this troublesome service until fresh orders on my part, whether because I should like thus to abuse my empire, or that, more indulgent or more just, it would suffice me to dispose of your feelings, without wishing to thwart your pleasures. Be that as it may, I would fain be obeyed; and my orders would be very rigorous!

'Tis true that then I should think myself obliged to thank you; and who knows? Perhaps even to reward you. For

instance, I should assuredly shorten an absence which would become insupportable to me. In short, I should see you again, Vicomte, and I should see you . . . . how? . . . . But you must remember this is no more than a conversation, a plain narrative of an impossible project, and I would not be the only one to forget it . . . .

Do you know that my law-suit makes me a little uneasy? I wanted, at last, to know exactly what my prospects were; my advocates, indeed, quote me sundry laws, and above all many *authorities*, as they call them: but I cannot see so much reason and justice in them. I am almost inclined to regret that I declined the compromise. However, I am reassured when I reflect that the attorney is skilful, the advocate eloquent, and the plaintiff pretty. If these three arguments were to be of no more worth, it would be necessary to change the whole course of affairs; and what, then, would become of the respect for ancient customs?

This law-suit is now the only thing which retains me here. That of Belleruche is finished: non-suited, costs divided. He is regretting this evening's ball; it is indeed the regret of the unemployed! I will restore him his complete liberty on my return to town. I make this grievous sacrifice for him, but am consoled by the generosity he finds in it.

Adieu, Vicomte; write to me often. The particulars of your pleasures will recompense me, at least in part, for the tedium I undergo.

At the Château de . . . , 11th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIFTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I AM endeavouring to write to you, without yet knowing if I shall be able. Ah God! When I think of my last letter, which my excessive happiness prevented me from continuing! It is the thought of my despair which overwhelms me now, which leaves me only strength enough to feel my sorrows, and deprives me of the power of expressing them.

Valmont—Valmont no longer loves me, he has never loved me. Love does not vanish thus. He deceives me, betrays me, outrages me. All misfortunes and humiliations that can be heaped together I experience, and it is from him that they come!

Do not suppose that this is a mere suspicion: I was so far from having any! I have not even the consolation of a doubt: what could he say to justify himself?.... But what matters it to him! He will not even make the attempt.... Unhappy wretch! What will thy reproaches and tears avail with him? He is far from thinking of thee!

'Tis true, then, that he has sacrificed me, exposed me even.... and to whom?.... A low creature.... But what am I saying? Ah, I have even lost the right to

despise her! She has been false to fewer duties, she is not so guilty as I. Oh, how bitter is the sorrow which is founded upon remorse! I feel my torments redouble.

Adieu, my dear friend; however unworthy I may have made myself of your pity, you will still feel it for me, if you can form any idea of what I suffer.

I have just read over my letter, and I perceive it can tell you nothing; I will try, then, to master up courage to relate the cruel incident. It was yesterday; for the first time since my return I was going to sup abroad. Valmont came to see me at five o'clock; never had he seemed so fond. He gave me to understand that my project of going out vexed him, and you may judge that I soon formed that of remaining with him. However, two hours and a half later, and suddenly, his air and tone underwent a sensible change. I know not whether I had let fall something which may have displeased him; be that as it may, shortly afterwards he pretended to recollect some business which compelled him to leave me, and went away: not without displaying a very lively regret, which seemed affectionate, and which I then believed to be sincere.

Being left alone, I judged it more proper not to excuse myself from my first engagement since I was at liberty to fulfil it. I completed my toilette and entered my carriage. Unfortunately, my coachman took me by way of the Opera, and I was involved in the crowd of people leaving; four yards in front of me, and in the rank next to my own, I perceived Valmont's carriage. My heart instantly palpitated, but it was not from fear; and my only idea was the desire that my carriage should go forward. Instead of that, it was his own which was forced to retreat, and

came alongside of mine. I instantly advanced; what was my astonishment to find a courtesan at his side, one well known as such! I withdrew, as you may well believe, and I had already seen quite enough to wound my heart; but you would hardly believe that this same woman, apparently informed by an odious confidence, never quitted the window of the carriage, nor ceased to stare at me, with peals of scandalous laughter.

In the condition of prostration to which I was reduced, I let myself, nevertheless, be driven to the house where I was to sup; but it was impossible for me to remain; I felt each instant on the point of swooning away, and, above all, I could not restrain my tears.

On my return, I wrote to M. de Valmont, and sent him my letter immediately; he was not at home. Wishing, at any price, to issue from this state of death, or to confirm it for ever, I sent again with orders to wait for him; but before midnight my servant returned, telling me that the coachman, who was back, had told him that his master would not be home that night. I thought this morning that I had nothing else to do than ask him for the return of my letters, and beg him to visit me no more. I have, indeed, given orders to this effect, but doubtless they were superfluous. It is nearly noon; he has not yet presented himself, and I have not received a word from him.

Now, my dear friend, I have nothing further to add: you are informed of everything, and you know my heart. My sole hope is that I may not long afflict your tender friendship.

Paris, 15th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SIXTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

DOUBTLESS, Monsieur, after what passed yesterday, you will not expect me to receive you again; nor, doubtless, are you at all desirous that I should! This note, therefore, is written less with the intention of begging you to come no more, than to request you to return the letters, which should never have existed, and which, if they may have interested you for a moment, as proofs of the infatuation you had occasioned, can only be indifferent to you now that this is dissipated, and that they only express a sentiment which you have destroyed.

I admit and confess that I am to blame for having shewn in you a confidence of which so many before me have been victims; in that I accuse myself alone: but I believed, at least, that I had not deserved to be handed over by you to insult and contempt. I believed that, in sacrificing all for you, and losing for you alone my rights to my own and others' esteem, I could, nevertheless, expect to be judged by you not more severely than by the public, whose opinion still discriminates, by an immense interval, between the frail woman and the woman who is depraved.



These wrongs, which would be wrongs in the case of anybody, are the only ones I shall mention. I shall be silent on those of love; your heart would not understand mine. Adieu, Monsieur.

Paris, 15th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SEVENTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL

THIS instant only, Madame, has your letter been handed to me; I shuddered as I read it, and it has left me with barely the strength to reply to it. What terrible idea, then, do you form of me? Ah, doubtless, I have my faults, and such faults as I shall never forgive myself, all my life, even were you to cover them with your indulgence. But how far from my soul have those ever been with which you reproach me! What, I! Humiliate you! Degrade you! When I respect you as much as I cherish you; when I have never felt a moment of pride save when you judged me worthy of you! You are deceived by appearances, and I admit they may have seemed against me: but did not your heart contain the wherewithal to contend against them, and did it not rebel at the mere thought that it could have a cause of complaint against mine? However, you believed it. So you not only judged me capable of this atrocious madness, but you even feared you had exposed yourself to it through your bounty to me. Ah, if you consider yourself to such a degree degraded by your love, I am myself, then, all that is vile in your eyes!

Oppressed by the painful emotion which this idea causes me, I am losing, in repelling it, the time I should

employ in destroying it. I will confess all: I am restrained also by quite another consideration. Must I retrace facts which I would fain obliterate, and fix your attention and my own upon a moment of error which I would fain redeem with the rest of my life, the cause of which I cannot even now conceive, and the memory of which must for ever be my humiliation and my despair? Ah, if my self-accusation is to excite your anger, you will not, at any rate, have to seek far for your revenge; it will be sufficient to hand me over to my remorse.

However, who would believe it? The first cause of this incident is the supreme charm which I experience when I am by you. It was this which caused me too long to forget important business which could not be postponed. I left you too late, and did not find the person of whom I was in search. I hoped to meet him at the Opera, and my visit there was equally unsuccessful. Émilie, whom I met there, whom I had known in days when I was far from knowing you or love; Émilie was without her carriage, and begged me to set her down at her house, not a dozen yards away, and to this I consented. But it was just then that I met you, and I felt immediately that you would be driven to hold me guilty.

The fear of displeasing or of grieving you is so potent with me that it was bound to be, and indeed was, speedily noticed. I admit even that it induced me to try and persuade the girl not to show herself; this precaution of delicacy was fatal to love. Accustomed, like all those of her condition, never to be certain of an empire, ever usurped, save by means of the abuse which they allow themselves to make of it, Émilie was by no means willing to allow so splendid an occasion to slip.

The more she saw my embarrassment increase, the more she affected to shew herself; and her mad merriment—and I blush to think that you could for a moment have thought yourself its object—was only caused by the cruel pain I experienced, which itself was but due to my respect and love.

So far, doubtless, I am more unfortunate than guilty, and those wrongs, *which would be wrongs in the case of anybody, and the only ones you mention*; those wrongs, being wiped away, cannot be a cause of reproach to me. But 'tis in vain you pass over in silence those of love: I shall not maintain a like silence concerning them; I have too great an interest in breaking it.

In the confusion in which I am thrown by this unaccountable deviation, it is not without extreme sorrow that I can bring myself to recall the memory of it. Penetrated with a sense of my failings, I would consent to pay the penalty for them, or I would wait for time, my eternal tenderness, and repentance to bring my pardon. But how can I be silent, when what is left for me to say concerns your delicacy?

Do not think I seek a pretence to excuse or palliate my fault: I confess my guilt. But I do not confess, I will never admit, that this humiliating error can be looked upon as a fault in love. Nay, what can there be in common between a surprise of the senses, a moment's self-oblivion, soon followed by shame and regret, and a pure sentiment which can only be born in a delicate soul and sustained by esteem, and of which, finally, happiness is the fruit? Ah, do not profane love thus! Above all, fear to profane yourself by uniting in the same point of view things which can never be confounded. Leave

vile and degraded women to dread a rivalry which they feel may be established in their own despire, and to know the pangs of a jealousy as humiliating as it is cruel: but do you turn away your eyes from objects which might sully their glance; and, pure as the Divinity, punish the offence without feeling it.

But what penalty will you impose on me that is more grievous than that which I undergo? What can be compared to the regret at having displeased you, the despair at having grieved you, the overwhelming idea of having rendered myself less worthy of you? You are absorbed in punishing me, and I ask you for consolations: not that I deserve them, but because they are necessary to me, and they can only come to me from you!

If, on a sudden, forgetful of our love, and setting no further price on my happiness, you wish, on the contrary, to hand me over to eternal sorrow, you have the right; strike: but if, more indulgent or more sensitive, you remind yourself once more of those tender sentiments which united our hearts; of that voluptuousness of the soul, always being born again and always felt more keenly; of those sweet and fortunate days which each of us owed to the other; all those benefits of love which love alone procures; perhaps you will prefer the power of renewing to that of destroying them. What can I say more? I have lost all, and lost it by my fault; but I can retrieve all by your bounty. It is for you to decide now. I will add but one word. Only yesterday you swore to me that my happiness was quite secure so long as it depended on you! Ah, Madame, will you abandon me to-day to an eternal despair?

Paris, 15th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

I INSIST, my charming friend: no, I am not in love, and it is not my fault if circumstances force me to play the part. Only consent, and return; you shall soon see for yourself how sincere I am. I made proof of it yesterday, and it cannot be destroyed by what occurs to-day.

Know then I was with the tender prude, and was quite without any other business: for the little Volanges, in spite of her condition, was to pass the whole night at Madame V\*\*\*'s infants' ball. My lack of employment had, at first, inclined me to prolong the evening, and I had even demanded a slight sacrifice with this view; but hardly was it granted, when the pleasure I had promised myself was disturbed by the idea of this love which you persist in ascribing to me, or at least, in reproaching me with; so much so that I felt no other desire except that of being able to assure myself, and convince you, that it was pure calumny on your part.

I made a violent resolve therefore; and, under some trivial pretext, left my fair much surprised and, doubtless, even more grieved. For myself, I went tranquilly to meet Émilie at the Opera; and she could testify to you, that,



until this morning, when we separated, no regret came to trouble our pleasures.

I had, however, fine cause enough for uneasiness, had not my utter indifference saved me from it; for you must know that I was hardly four doors away from the Opera, with Émilie in my carriage, when that of the austere Puritan drew up exactly beside mine, and a block which occurred left us for nearly half a quarter of an hour side by side. We could see each other as clearly as at noon, and there was no means of escape.

Nor is this all; I took it into my head to confide to Émilie that it was the woman of the letter. (You will remember, perhaps, that piece of folly, and that Émilie was the desk).<sup>1</sup> She had not forgotten it, and, as she is a laughter-loving creature, she could not be at peace until she had examined, at her ease, *this piece of virtue*, as she said, and this with peals of such scandalous laughter as would have angered anyone.

Still this is not all; the jealous woman sent to my house the very same night! I was not there; but, in her obstinacy, she sent a second time, with orders to wait for me. As soon as I had made up my mind to sleep with Émilie, I had sent back my carriage, with no other order to the coachman but to return and fetch me this morning; and as, on reaching home, he found the messenger of love, he told him very simply that I should not be back that night. You can well imagine the effect of this news, and that on my return I found my dismissal announced with all the dignity proper to the occasion.

Thus this adventure, which in your view was never to

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<sup>1</sup> Letters the forty-sixth and forty-seventh.

be determined, could have been finished, as you see, this morning; if it is not finished, that is not, as you will believe, because I set any price on its continuation: it is, first, because I did not think it decent that I should let myself be quitted; and again, because I wished to reserve for you the honour of the sacrifice.

I answered this severe note, therefore, in a long letter full of sentiment; I gave lengthy reasons and relied on love to make them acceptable. I have already succeeded. I have just received a second note, still very rigorous and confirming the eternal rupture, as it ought to be; the tone of it, however, is not the same. Above all, I am not to be seen again: this resolution is announced four times in the most irrevocable fashion. I concluded thereby, that I was not to lose a moment before I presented myself. I have already sent my *chasseur* to win over the porter; and, in an instant, I shall go myself, to have my pardon sealed: for in sins of this nature, there is only one formula which carries a general absolution; and that can only be performed at an audience.

Adieu, my charming friend; I fly to make trial of this great event.

Paris, 15th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-NINTH

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

How I reproach myself, my tender friend, for having spoken to you too much and too soon of my passing sorrows! I am the cause if you are grieved at present; those sorrows which you derive from me still endure; and I—I am happy. Yes, all is forgotten, pardoned; rather let me say, all is redeemed. Peace and delight have succeeded to this state of sorrow and anguish. O joy of my heart, how can I express you! Valmont is innocent; no one is guilty who loves so well. Those serious, offensive wrongs for which I reproached him with so much bitterness he had not committed; and if on a certain point, my indulgence was necessary, had I not also my injustice to repair?

I will not enter into the details of the facts or reasons which justify him; perhaps, even, the mind would but ill appreciate them: it is the heart alone which is capable of feeling them. If, however, you were to suspect me of weakness, I would summon your judgment to the aid of my own. With men, you have said yourself, infidelity is not inconstancy.

'Tis not that I do not feel that this distinction, which opinion justifies in vain, none the less wounds our delicacy; but of what should mine complain, when that of Valmont

suffers even more? For the very wrong which I forget do not believe that he forgives himself, or is consoled. And yet how greatly has he retrieved this trivial error by the excess of his love and my happiness!

Either my felicity is greater, or I know the value of it better, since I have been afraid that I had lost it: but what I may tell you is that, if I felt I had sufficient strength to support again sorrows as cruel as those I have just undergone, I should not deem I paid too high a price for the excess of happiness I have tasted since. O my tender mother, scold your inconsiderate daughter for having grieved you by too much hastiness; scold her for having judged rashly and calumniated him whom she should ever adore: but, whilst recognizing her imprudence, see her happy, and enhance her joy by sharing it.

Paris, 15th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTIETH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

How comes it, my lovely friend, that I receive no reply from you? Yet my last letter seemed to me to deserve one; these three days I could have received it, and I am awaiting it still! Indeed, I am vexed; I shall not speak to you at all, therefore, of my grand affairs.

That the reconciliation had its full effect; that, instead of reproaches and distrust, it but called forth fresh proofs of fondness; that it is I, at present, who receive the excuses and reparation due to my suspected candour, I shall tell you no word of this: and but for the unexpected occurrence of last night, I should not write to you at all. But, as that concerns your pupil, who probably will not be in a condition to tell you of it herself, at any rate for some time to come, I have charged myself with the task.

For reasons which you may or may not guess, Madame de Tourvel has not engaged my attention for some days past; and as these reasons could not exist in the case of the little Volanges, I became more attentive to her. Thanks to the obliging porter, I had no obstacles to overcome, and we led, your pupil and I, a comfortable and regular life. But habit leads to negligence: during the first days, we could never take precautions enough

for our safety; we trembled even behind the bolts. Yesterday, an incredible piece of forgetfulness caused the accident of which I have to inform you; and if, for my part, I escaped with a fright, it has cost the little girl considerably more.

We were not asleep, but were in that state of repose and abandonment which succeeds to pleasure, when we heard, on a sudden, the door of the room open. I at once seized my sword, as much for my own defence as for that of our common pupil; I advanced, and saw no one: but, indeed, the door was open. As we had a light, I made a search, but found no living soul. I remembered, then, that we had forgotten our ordinary precautions, and no doubt the door, which had been only pushed to or badly shut, had opened of itself.

On rejoining my timid companion, with a view to calming her, I no longer found her in the bed; she had fallen, or hidden herself, betwixt the bed and wall: she was stretched there without consciousness, with no other movements than violent convulsions. You may imagine my embarrassment! I succeeded, however, in putting her back in the bed, and even in bringing her to, but she had hurt herself in her fall, and it was not long before she felt the effects.

Pains in the loins, violent colic pains, symptoms even less ambiguous, had soon enlightened me as to her condition: but, to acquaint her with it, I had first to tell her of that in which she was before; for she had no suspicion of it. Never perhaps, before her, did any-one preserve so much innocence, after doing so well all that is necessary to get rid of it! Oh, this one loses no time in reflection!



But she lost a great deal in bewailing herself, and I felt it was time to come to a resolution. I agreed with her, then, that I would go at once to the physician and to the surgeon of the family, and, informing them they would be sent for, would confide the whole truth to them, under a promise of secrecy; that she, on her side, should ring for her waiting-maid; that she should, or should not, take her into her confidence, as she liked, but that she should send her to seek assistance, and forbid her, above all, to awake Madame de Volanges; a natural and delicate attention on the part of a daughter who fears to cause her mother anxiety.

I made my two visits and my two confessions with what speed I could, and thence returned home, nor have I gone abroad since; but the surgeon, whom I knew before, came at noon to give me an account of his patient's condition. I was not mistaken; but he hopes that, if no accident occurs, nothing will be noticed in the house. The maid is in the secret; the physician has given the complaint a name; and this business will be settled like a thousand others, unless it be useful for us to speak of it hereafter.

But have we still any interests in common, you and I? Your silence would lead me to doubt it; I should not even believe it at all, did not my desire lead me to seek every means of preserving the hope of it.

Adieu, my lovely friend; I embrace you, though I bear you a grudge.

Paris, 21st November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FIRST

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

GOOD God, Vicomte, how you trouble me with your obstinacy! What does my silence matter to you? Do you suppose, if I maintain it, that it is for lack of reasons to justify it? Ah, would to God it were! But no; it is only that it is painful for me to tell you them.

Tell me truly: are you under an illusion yourself, or are you trying to deceive me? The disparity between what you say and what you do leaves me no choice between these two sentiments: which is the true one? Pray, what would you have me say to you, when I myself do not know what to think?

You appear to make a great merit of your last scene with the Présidente; but, pray, what does it prove for your system, or against mine? I certainly never said that you loved this woman well enough not to deceive her, or not to seize every occasion which might seem to you easy or agreeable: I never even doubted but that it would be very much the same to you to satisfy with another, with the first comer, the same desires which she alone could have raised; and I am not surprised that, in the licentiousness of mind which one would be wrong to deny you, you have done once from deliberation what you have

done a thousand times from opportunity. Who does not know that this is the simple way of the world, and the custom of you all, whoever you are, to whatever class you belong, from the rascal to the *espèces*? Whoever abstains from it, nowadays, passes for a romantic; and that is not, I think, the fault with which I reproach you.

But what I have said, what I have thought, and what I still think, is that you are none the less in love with your Président. Truly not with a love that is very pure or very tender, but with that of which you are capable; that kind, for instance, which enables you to find in a woman attractions or qualities which she does not possess; which places her in a class apart, and puts all other women in the second rank; which keeps you attached to her even when you outrage her; such, in short, as I conceive a sultan may feel for a favourite sultana, which does not prevent him from preferring to her often a simple odalisque. My comparison seems to me all the more just because, like him, you are never either the lover or friend of a woman, but always her tyrant or her slave. Thus, I am quite sure you humbled and abased yourself mightily, to regain this lovely creature's good graces! And only too happy at having succeeded, as soon as you think the moment has arrived to obtain your pardon, you leave me *for this grand event*.

In your last letter, again, if you do not speak exclusively of this woman, it is because you will not tell me anything *of your grand affairs*; they seem to you so important that the silence which you maintain on this subject seems to you sufficient punishment for me. And it is after these thousand proofs of your decided preference for another that you ask me calmly whether we still have *any interests*

*in common!* Take care, Vicomte! If I once answer you, my answer will be irrevocable: and to be afraid to give it at this moment is perhaps already to have said too much. I am resolved, therefore, to speak no more of it.

All that I can do is to tell you a story. May be you will not have time to read it, or to give so much attention to it as to understand it right? That is your affair. At worst it will only be a story wasted.

A man of my acquaintance was entangled, like you, with a woman who did him little honour. He had indeed, at intervals, the wit to feel that, sooner or later, this adventure would do him harm: but although he blushed for it, he had not the courage to break it off. His embarrassment was all the greater in that he had boasted to his friends that he was entirely free; and that he was well aware that, when one meets with ridicule, it is always increased by self-defence. He passed his life thus, never ceasing to commit follies, never ceasing to say afterwards: *It is not my fault*. This man had a friend, and she was tempted at one moment to give him up to the public in this state of frenzy, and thus render his ridicule indelible: however, being more generous than malicious, or, perhaps, for some other motive, she wished to make one last attempt, so that, whatever happened, she might be in a position to say, like her friend: *It is not my fault*. She sent him, therefore, without any other explanation, the following letter, as a remedy whose application might be useful to his disease:

"One tires of everything, my angel: it is a law of nature; it is not my fault.

"If, then, I am tired to-day of an adventure which has

occupied me exclusively for four mortal months, it is not my fault.

"If, for instance, I had just as much love as you had virtue, and that is saying much, it is not surprising that one should finish at the same time as the other. It is not my fault.

"Hence it follows that for some time past I have deceived you: but then your pitiless fondness in some measure forced me to it! It is not my fault.

"To-day, a woman whom I love to distraction demands that I sacrifice you. It is not my fault.

"I am very sensible that here is a fine opportunity for calling me perjured: but, if nature has only gifted men with constancy, whilst it has given women obstinacy, it is not my fault.

"Believe me, take another lover, as I have taken another mistress. This advice is good, very good; if you think it bad, it is not my fault.

"Adieu, my angel; I took you with pleasure, I leave you without regret: perhaps I shall return. This is the way of the world. It is not my fault."

It is not the moment, Vicomte, to tell you the effect of this last attempt, and what resulted from it: but I promise to let you know in my next letter. You will find there also my *ultimatum* as to the renewal of the treaty you propose. Until then, quite simply, adieu...

By the way, I thank you for your details as to the little Volanges; it is an article that will keep for the gazette of scandal on the day after her marriage. In the meantime I send you my condolences on the loss of your progeny. Good-night, Vicomte.

At the Château de . . . , 24th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SECOND

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

UPON my word, my lovely friend, I know not whether I have misread or misunderstood your letter, and the story you told me, and the model little epistle which it contained. All I can tell you is that this last seemed to me original and calculated to produce an effect: so that I simply copied it, and, quite simply again, sent it to the celestial Présidente. I did not lose a moment, for the tender missive was dispatched yesterday evening. I preferred it thus, because, first, I had promised to write to her yesterday; and again, because I thought a whole night would not be too long for her to reflect and meditate *upon this grand event*, even though you should reproach me a second time with the expression.

I hoped to be able to send you my beloved's reply this morning; but it is nearly noon, and I have as yet received nothing. I shall wait until five o'clock; and, if then I have no news of her, I shall go and enquire myself; for in matters of form, above all, 'tis only the first step that is difficult.

At present, as you may well believe, I am most anxious to hear the end of the story of this man of your acquaintance, so vehemently suspected of not knowing at need how to



sacrifice a woman. Did he not amend? And did not his generous friend give him her pardon?

I am no less anxious to receive your *ultimatum*, as you so politically say! I am curious, above all, to know if you will find love again in this last proceeding. Ah, no doubt, there is, and much of it! But for whom? Still, I make no pretensions, and I expect everything from your charity.

Adieu, my charming friend; I shall not seal this letter until two o'clock, in the hope of being able to enclose the expected reply.

*At two o'clock in the afternoon.*

Still nothing; I am in a mighty hurry; I have not time to add a word: but this time, will you still refuse the tenderest kisses of love?

Paris, 25th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-THIRD

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

THE veil is rent, Madame, upon which was painted the illusion of my happiness. Grim truth enlightens me, and shews me naught but a sure and speedy death, the road to which is traced between shame and remorse. I will follow it . . . , I will cherish my torments, if they cut short my existence. I send you the letter which I received yesterday; I will add no reflexions on it, it contains them all. The time has passed for complaint; nothing is left but to suffer. It is not pity I need, but strength.

Receive, Madame, the one farewell that I shall utter, and grant my last prayer; it is to leave me to my fate, to forget me utterly, to consider me no longer upon the earth. There is a stage of misery in which even friendship augments our sufferings and cannot heal them. When wounds are mortal, all succour becomes inhuman. All emotion is foreign to me save that of despair. Nothing can befit me now save the profound darkness in which I will bury my shame. There I will weep over my faults, if I can still weep; for since yesterday I have not shed a tear! My withered heart no longer furnishes any.

Adieu, Madame. Do not answer me. I have made a vow upon that cruel letter never to receive another.

Paris, 27th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOURTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

YESTERDAY, at three o'clock in the evening, my lovely friend, being out of patience at having received no news, I presented myself at the house of the deserted fair; I was told that she was out. I saw nothing more in this phrase than a refusal to receive me, at which I was neither vexed nor surprised; and I retired, in the hope that this step would induce so polite a woman to honour me with at least a word of reply. The desire I had to receive it brought me home on purpose about nine o'clock, but I found nothing there. Astonished at this silence, for which I was not prepared, I sent my *chasseur* for information, and to discover if the sensitive person was dying or dead. At last, when I had returned, he informed me that Madame de Tourvel had, indeed, gone out at eleven in the forenoon with her waiting-maid; that she was driven to the Convent of . . .; and that, at seven o'clock in the evening, she sent back her carriage and servants, saying that they were not to expect her home. This is certainly acting according to rule. The convent is the widow's right asylum; and, if she persists in so laudable a resolution, I shall add to all the other obligations which

I owe her that of the celebrity which this adventure will assume.

I told you some time ago that, in spite of your uneasiness, I should only reappear upon the stage of the world brilliant with new *éclat*. Let them shew themselves, then, these severe critics, who accused me of a romantic and unhappy passion; let them make quicker or more brilliant ruptures: nay, let them do better, let them present themselves as consolers, the way is clear for them. Well, let them only dare to attempt the course which I have run from end to end; and, if one of them obtains the least success, I yield him the place of honour. But they will all discover that, when I am at any pains, the impression I leave is ineffaceable. This one I am sure will be so; and I should look upon all my other triumphs as nothing, if in this case I was ever to have a favoured rival.

The course she has taken flatters my self-love, I admit; but I am annoyed that she should have found sufficient strength to separate herself so much from me. There will be no obstacles between us, then, save those of my own formation! What! If I wished to renew with her, she might be unwilling? What am I saying? She would not desire it, deem it no more her supreme happiness? Is it thus that one loves? And do you think, my lovely friend, that I ought to suffer it? Could I not, for instance, and would it not be better, endeavour to bring this woman to the point of seeing the possibility of a reconciliation, which one always desires, as long as one has hope? I could try this course without attaching any importance to it, and consequently without your taking umbrage. On the contrary, it would be a simple experiment which we would perform in concert; and, even if I

should succeed, it would but be one means the more of repeating, when you wished it, a sacrifice which seems to have been agreeable to you. Now, my fair one, I am waiting to receive the reward, and all my prayers are for your return. Come quickly then to recover your lover, your pleasures, your friends and the current of adventure.

That of the little Volanges has turned out amazing well. Yesterday, my uneasiness not allowing me to remain in one place, I called, amongst my various excursions, upon Madame de Volanges. I found your pupil already in the *salon*, still in the costume of an invalid, but in full convalescence, looking only fresher and more interesting. You women, in a like situation, would have lain a month on your long-chair: my faith, long live our *demoiselles*! This one, in truth, gave me a desire to see if the recovery was a complete one!

I have still to tell you that the little girl's accident had like to have turned your *sentimental* Danceny's head. At first it was grief; to-day it is joy. *His Cécile* was ill! You can imagine how the brain reels at such a calamity. Three times a day he sent to enquire after her, and on no occasion omitted to present himself; finally, in a noble epistle, he asked mamma's permission to go and congratulate her on the convalescence of so dear an object, and Madame de Volanges consented: so much so that I found the young man established as in the old days, save for a certain familiarity which as yet he dares not permit himself.

It is from himself that I have learned these details, for I left at the same time with him, and made him chatter. You can have no notion of the effect this visit has had on him. Joy, desires, transports impossible to describe. I, with my fondness for grand emotions, completed the

work of turning his head, by assuring him that, in a very few days, I would put him in the way of seeing his fair one at closer quarters.

Indeed, I am determined to hand her over to him as soon as I have made my experiment. I wish to consecrate myself to you wholly; and then, would it be worth while that your pupil should also be my scholar, if she were to deceive nobody but her husband? The masterpiece is to deceive her lover, and above all her first lover! As for myself, I have not to reproach myself with having uttered the word love.

Adieu, my lovely friend; return soon, then, to enjoy your empire over me, to receive its homage, and to pay me its reward.

Paris, 28th November, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FIFTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

SERIOUSLY, Vicomte, have you left the Présidente? Have you sent her the letter which I wrote you for her? Really, you are charming; and you have surpassed my expectations! In all good faith, I confess that this triumph gratifies me more than all those I have hitherto obtained. You will think, perhaps, that I set a very high value on this woman, whom recently I so disparaged; not at all: but it is not over her that I have gained the advantage; it is over you: that is the amusing and really delicious part of it.

Yes, Vicomte, you loved Madame de Tourvel much, and you love her still; you are madly in love with her: but, because I amused myself by making you ashamed of it, you bravely sacrificed her. You would have sacrificed a thousand of her, rather than submit to raillery. To what lengths will not vanity carry us! The wise man was right, indeed, when he said that it was the enemy of happiness.

Where would you be now, if I had only wished to play you a trick? But I am incapable of deceit, as you well know; and, should you even reduce me in my turn to the convent and despair, I will run the risk, and surrender to my victor.

If I capitulate, however, it is really mere frailty: for, if I liked, what quibbles I might set up! And perhaps you would deserve them! I admire, for instance, the skill, or the awkwardness, with which you sweetly propose to me that you should be allowed to renew with the Présidente. It would suit you mightily, would it not? To take all the merit of this rupture, without losing thereby the pleasures of enjoyment? And then, as this apparent sacrifice would be no longer one for you, you offer to repeat it when I wish it! By this arrangement, the celestial prude would always believe herself to be the single choice of your heart, whilst I should plume myself on being the preferred rival; we should both of us be deceived, but you would be happy; and what does the rest matter?

'Tis a pity that, with such a genius for conceiving projects, you should have so little for their execution; and that, by a single ill-considered step, you should have yourself put an invincible obstacle to what you most desire.

What! You had an idea of renewing, and you could write my letter! You must have thought me clumsy indeed! Ah, believe me, Vicomte, when one woman strikes at another's heart, she rarely fails to find the vital spot, and the wound is incurable. When I was striking this one, or rather guiding your blows, I had not forgotten that the woman was my rival, that you had, for one moment, preferred her to me, and, in short, that you had rated me below her. If my vengeance has been deceived, I consent to bear the blame. Thus I am satisfied that you should try every means: I even invite you to do so, and promise you not to be vexed at your success, if you should attain it. I am so easy on the subject that I will trouble no further about it. Let us speak of something else.

For instance, of the health of the little Volanges. You will give me definite news of it on my return, will you not? I shall be very glad to have some. After that, it will be for you to judge whether it will suit you best to restore her to her lover or to endeavour to become once more the founder of a new branch of the Valmonts, under the name of Gercourt. This idea strikes me as rather diverting; and, in leaving you your choice, I ask you not to take any definite step until we have talked of it together. This does not delay you very long, for I shall be in Paris immediately. I cannot tell you the precise day; but you may be sure that you will be the first informed of my arrival.

Adieu, Vicomte; in spite of my peevishness, my malice, and my reproaches, I have still much love for you, and I am preparing to prove it to you. *Au revoir*, my friend.

At the Château de . . . , 29th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SIXTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

AT last I am leaving, my young friend ; and to-morrow evening I shall be back again in Paris. In the midst of all the confusion which a change of residence involves, I shall receive no one. However, if you have some very pressing confidence to make me, I am quite willing to except you from the general rule: I beg you, therefore, to keep the secret of my arrival. Valmont even will not be informed of it.

Had anyone told me, a short time ago, that soon you would have my exclusive confidence, I should not have believed it. But yours has attracted mine. I am tempted to believe that you have brought some skill to this end, perhaps even some seduction. That would be very wrong, to say the least! For the rest, it would not be dangerous now; you have really other and better occupations! When the heroine is on the scene, there is little notice taken of the confidant.

Indeed, you have not even found time to acquaint me of your new successes. When your Cécile was absent, the days were not long enough to hear your tender complaints. You would have made them to the echoes, if I had not been there to hear them. Since then, when she was ill,

you honoured me again with the recital of your anxieties; you wanted someone to whom to tell them. But now that she whom you love is in Paris, that she is recovered, and, above all, that you sometimes see her, she is all-sufficing, and your friends see no more of you.

I do not blame you; it is the fault of your twenty years. From Alcibiades down to yourself, do we not know that young people are unacquainted with friendship, save in their sorrows? Happiness sometimes makes them indiscreet, but never confiding. I am ready to say with Socrates: *I love my friends to come to me when they are unhappy.*<sup>1</sup> But, in his quality of a philosopher, he could dispense with them when they did not come. In that I shew less wisdom than he, and I felt your silence with all a woman's weakness.

Do not, however, think me exacting: I am far from being that! The same sentiment which makes me notice these privations enables me to support them with courage, when they are the proof, or the cause, of my friends' happiness. I do not count on you, therefore, for to-morrow evening, save in so far as love may leave you free and disengaged, and I forbid you to make the least sacrifice for me.

Adieu, Chevalier; it will be a real festival to see you again: will you come?

At the Château de . . . , 29th November, 17\*\*.

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<sup>1</sup> Marmontel: *Conte moral d'Alcibiade*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SEVENTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I AM sure you will be as grieved as I am, my worthy friend, to learn of the condition in which Madame de Tourvel lies; she has been ill since yesterday: her disorder appeared so suddenly, and exhibits such grave symptoms, that I am really alarmed.

A burning fever, a violent and almost constant delirium, an unquenchable thirst: that is all that can be remarked. The doctors say they can make no diagnosis as yet; and the treatment will be all the more difficult, because the patient refuses every kind of remedy with such obstinacy that it was necessary to hold her down by force to bleed her; and the same course had to be followed on two other occasions to tie up her bandage, which in her delirium she persists in tearing off.

You, who have seen her, as I have, so fragile, timid and quiet, cannot conceive that four persons are barely enough to hold her; and at the slightest expostulation she flies into indescribable fury! For my part, I am afraid it is something worse than delirium, and that she is really gone out of her mind.

What increases my fear on this subject is a thing which occurred the day before yesterday. Upon that day, she



arrived about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, with her waiting-maid, at the Convent of.... As she was educated in that house, and had continued the habit of sometimes visiting it, she was received as usual, and seemed to everyone calm and in good health. About two hours later, she enquired if the room she had occupied as a school-girl was vacant, and, on being answered in the affirmative, she asked to go and see it: the Prioress accompanied her with some other nuns. It was then that she declared that she had come back to take her abode in that room, which, said she, she ought never to have left, and which, she added, she would never leave *until her death*: those were her words.

At first they knew not what to say: but when their first astonishment was over, it was represented to her that her position as a married woman prevented them from receiving her without a special permission. Neither this, nor a thousand other reasons, made any impression; and from that moment she obstinately refused, not only to leave the convent, but even her room. At last, weary of the discussion, they consented, at seven o'clock in the evening, that she should pass the night there. Her carriage and servants were dismissed; and they awaited the next day to come to some decision.

I am assured that, all through the evening, her air and bearing, far from being wild, were composed and deliberate; only that she fell four or five times into a reverie so deep that they could not rouse her from it by speaking to her; and, that, each time before she issued from it, she carried her two hands to her brow, which she seemed to clasp vigorously: upon which, one of the nuns who were with her having asked her if her head pained her, she gazed at her

a long time before replying, and said at last, "The hurt is not there!" A moment later, she asked to be left alone, and begged that no further question should be put to her.

Everyone retired except her waiting-maid: who was fortunately obliged to sleep in the same chamber, for lack of other room. According to this girl's account, her mistress was pretty quiet until eleven o'clock. She then expressed a wish to go to bed: but, before she was quite undressed, she began to walk up and down her chamber, with much action and frequent gestures. Julie, who had been a witness of what had passed during the day, dared say naught to her, and waited in silence for nearly an hour. At length, Madame de Tourvel called to her twice in quick succession; she had but the time to run up, when her mistress fell into her arms, saying, "I am exhausted." She let herself be led to bed, and would not take anything, nor allow any help to be sent for. She merely had some water placed near her and ordered Julie to lie down.

The girl declares that she remained awake until two in the morning, and that, during that time, she heard neither a movement nor a complaint. But she says that she was awakened at five o'clock by the talk of her mistress, who was speaking in a loud and high voice; and that, having enquired if she needed anything, and obtaining no reply, she took the light and went to the bed of Madame de Tourvel, who did not recognize her, but suddenly interrupting her incoherent remarks, cried out excitedly, "Leave me alone, leave me in the darkness; it is the darkness that becomes me." I remarked yesterday myself that she often repeats this phrase.

At length, Julie profited by this kind of order to go out and seek other assistance: but Madame de Tourvel

refused it, with the fury and delirium which she has displayed so often since.

The confusion into which this threw the whole convent induced the Prioress to send for me at seven o'clock yesterday morning . . . It was not yet daylight. I hastened there at once. When my name was announced to Madame de Tourvel, she appeared to recover her consciousness, and replied, "Ah, yes, let her come in." But, when I reached her bed, she looked fixedly at me, took my hand excitedly, gripped it, and said in a loud but gloomy voice, "I am dying because I did not believe you." Immediately afterwards, hiding her eyes, she returned to her most frequent remark: "Leave me alone," etc., and lost all consciousness.

This phrase and some others which fell from her in her delirium make me fear lest this cruel affliction may have a cause which is crueller still. But let us respect the secrets of our friend, and be content to pity her misfortune.

The whole of yesterday was equally tempestuous, and was divided between fits of alarming delirium and moments of lethargic depression, the only ones when she takes or gives any rest. I did not leave her bedside until nine o'clock in the evening, and I shall return to it this morning to pass the day there. I will certainly not abandon my unfortunate friend: but the heart-rending part of it is her obstinacy in refusing all attention and succour.

I send you the bulletin of last night, which I have just received, and which, as you will see, is anything but consoling. I will be careful to forward them all to you punctually.

Adieu, my respected friend, I am going back to the patient. My daughter, who is fortunately almost recovered, sends you her respects.

Paris, 29th November, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHTH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

O YOU whom I love! O thou whom I adore! O you who have commenced my happiness! O thou who hast crowned it! Compassionate friend, tender mistress, why must the recollection of thy sorrow come to trouble the charm which I undergo? Ah, Madame, be calm, 'tis friendship which implores you. O my friend, be happy, 'tis the prayer of love.

Nay, what reproaches have you to make to yourself? Believe me, you are misled by your delicacy. The regrets it causes you, the injuries of which it accuses me, are equally imaginary; and my heart feels that between us two there has been no other seducer but love. Dread no longer, then, to yield to the sentiments you inspire, to let yourself be penetrated by all the fires you yourself have kindled. What! would our hearts be less pure, if they had been later illuminated? Doubtless, no. 'Tis seduction, on the contrary, which, acting never except by plan, can regulate its progress and its methods, and, from a distance, foresee events. But true love does not thus permit itself to meditate and reflect: it distracts us from our thoughts by our sentiments; its sway is never stronger than when it is unknown; and it is in shadow and

silence that it entangles us in bonds which it is alike impossible to notice or to break.

Thus, as late as yesterday, in spite of the lively emotion which the idea of your return caused me, in spite of the extreme pleasure I felt at seeing you, I nevertheless thought myself to be called and guided still by calm friendship only: or rather, abandoned wholly to the soft sentiments of my heart, I was very little concerned to unravel their origin or their cause. Like myself, my tender friend, you experienced, unconsciously, that imperious charm which handed over our souls to the sweet impressions of affection; and neither of us recognized Love, until we had issued from the intoxication in which the god had plunged us.

But that very fact justifies instead of condemning us. No, you have not been false to friendship, and I have not abused your confidence. 'Tis true, we were both ignorant of our feelings; but we only underwent this illusion, we did not seek to give birth to it. Ah, far from complaining of it, let us only think of the happiness it has procured us; and, without troubling it with unjust reproaches, let us only be concerned to enhance it by the charm of constancy and security! O my friend, how my heart dotes on this hope! Yes, freed, henceforward, from every fear, and given over wholly to love, you will participate in my desires, my transports, the delirium of my senses, the intoxication of my soul; and every moment of our fortunate days shall be marked by a new enjoyment.

Adieu, thou whom I adore! I shall see thee, this evening, but shall I find thee alone? I dare not hope it. Nay! you do not desire it as much I do!

Paris, 1st December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-NINTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I HAD hoped yesterday, almost all day, my revered friend, to be able to give you more favourable news this morning as to the health of our dear invalid: but this hope has been destroyed since last evening, and I am only left with the regret that I have lost it. An event, seemingly of scant importance, but cruel in the results it caused, has rendered the condition of our invalid at least as grievous as it was before, if, indeed, it has not made it worse.

I should have understood no whit of this sudden change, had I not received yesterday the complete confidence of our unhappy friend. As she did not conceal from me that you were also acquainted with all her misfortunes, I can speak to you, without reserve, of her sad situation.

Yesterday morning, when I reached the convent, I was informed that the invalid had been asleep for the last three hours; and her slumber was so calm and deep that I was afraid for a moment that it was lethargic. Shortly afterwards, she awoke, and herself drew back the curtains of her bed. She gazed at us all with an air of surprise; and when I rose to go to her, she recognized me, spoke my name, and begged me to draw near. She left me no time to question her, but asked me where she was, what



we were doing there, if she was sick, and why she was not at home. I thought, at first, that it was a new delirium, only of a more tranquil kind than the last; but I perceived that she fully understood my answers. In fact, she had recovered her reason, but not her memory.

She questioned me very minutely as to all that had happened to her since she had been at the convent, whither she did not remember coming. I answered her correctly, only suppressing what might have given her too much alarm; and when I asked her, in my turn, how she felt, she replied that she was not in pain at that moment, but that she had suffered greatly in her sleep and felt tired. I persuaded her to be quiet and to talk little; after which, I partly closed her curtains, leaving them half open, and sat down by her bed. At the same time some broth was suggested, which she took and found good.

She remained thus for about half an hour, during which time her only words were to thank me for the attention I had given her; and she brought to these thanks that grace and charm which you know. She then maintained for some time an absolute silence, which she only broke to say, "Ah yes, I remember coming here." And a moment later, she cried pitifully, "My friend, my friend, pity me; my miseries are all coming back to me." Then as I advanced towards her, she seized my hand, and resting her head upon it: "Dear God!" she went on, "can I not die then?" Her expression, more than these words even, moved me to tears; she perceived them in my voice, and said to me, "You pity me! Ah, did you but know...." and then, interrupting herself: "Arrange that we can be left alone, and I will tell you all." As I believe I have informed you, I had my suspicions already as to what was

to be the subject of this confidence; and, fearing that the conversation, which I foresaw would be long and sorrowful, might, perhaps, be harmful to the condition of our unhappy friend, I refused at first, under the pretext that she required rest; but she insisted, and I yielded to her instances. We were no sooner alone than she told me all that you have already heard from her, which, for that reason, I will not repeat to you. Finally, while speaking of the cruel fashion in which she had been sacrificed, she added, "I felt very certain it would be my death, and I had the courage for it; but what is impossible to me is to survive my misfortune and my shame."

I tried to vanquish this discouragement, or rather this despair, with the arms of religion, which, hitherto, had such power over her; but I soon perceived that I had not strength enough for these august functions, and I confined myself to a proposal to call in the Père Anselme, whom I know to be entirely in her confidence. She agreed to this, and even seemed to desire it greatly. He was sent for and came at once. He stayed for a long time with the patient, and said, on leaving, that, if the physicians judged as he did, he thought the ceremony of the sacraments might be deferred; that he would return on the following day.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and until five our friend was fairly quiet; so much so that we had all regained hope. Unfortunately, a letter was brought up to her. When they would have given it her, she answered first that she would not receive any, and no one pressed it. But from that moment she shewed greater agitation. Shortly afterwards, she asked whence this letter

came. It had no post-mark: who had brought it? No one knew. From whom had it been sent? The portress had not been told. She then kept silence for some time, after which she began to speak; but her wandering talk only told us that she was again delirious.

However, there was another quiet interval, until at last she requested that the letter which had been brought should be given her. As soon as she had cast her eyes on it, she cried, "From him! Good God!" and then in a strong but oppressed voice, "Take it back, take it back." She had her bed-curtains shut immediately, and forbade anybody to come near her; but we were almost immediately compelled to return to her side. The frenzy had returned more violent than ever, and really terrible convulsions were joined to it. These attacks had not ceased by the evening, and this morning's bulletin informs me that the night has not been less stormy. In short, her state is such that I am astonished she has not already succumbed, and I will not hide from you that I have very little hope left.

I suppose this unfortunate letter was from M. de Valmont: but what can he still dare write to her? Forgive me, my dear friend; I refrain from all reflexion: but it is cruel, indeed, to see a woman make so wretched an end, who was hitherto so deservedly happy.

Paris, 2nd December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

WHILE I wait for the happiness of seeing you, I abandon myself, my tender friend, to the pleasure of writing to you, and it is by occupying myself with you that I dispel my regret for your absence. To retrace my sentiments for you, to recall your own, is a real delight to my heart; and it is thus that even a time of privation offers me still a thousand benefits precious to my love. However, if I am to believe you, I shall obtain no reply from you: this very letter is to be the last, and we must refrain from a correspondence which, according to you, is dangerous, *and of which we have no need*. Assuredly, I will believe you, if you insist: for what can you wish that does not become my own wish, for that very reason? But, before being wholly resolved, will you not permit me to discuss the matter with you?

Of the question of danger, you must be the sole judge: I can calculate nothing, and I confine myself to begging you to watch over your safety; for I can have no peace while you are uneasy. For this purpose, it is not we two who are but one, but you who are both of us.

It is not the same with *our wants*: here we can have but one thought; and if our opinion differs, it is, perhaps,

only for lack of explanation or from misunderstanding. This, then, methinks, is what I feel.

No doubt a letter seems by no means indispensable, when one can see each other freely. What could it say that a word, a glance, or even silence would not say a hundred times better still? This seems to me so true that, at the moment when you spoke of our ceasing to correspond, the idea easily crept into my soul; it troubled it perhaps, but did not wound it. It is even, as it were, when, wishing to press a kiss upon your bosom, I meet with a riband or a veil; I do but thrust it aside, and have no feeling of an obstacle.

But, since then, we are separated; and, now that you are no longer here, this thought of our correspondence has come back to torture me. Why, say I to myself, this privation the more? Nay, is it a reason, because one is far away, that one should have no more to say? I will assume that, favoured by circumstance, we pass a whole day together; must we waste the time in talking which is meant for pleasure? Yes, for pleasure, my tender friend; for, by your side, even the moments of repose are full of a delicious enjoyment. But at last, however long the time may be, one ends by separation; and then one is all alone! 'Tis then that a letter is precious! If one reads it not, at least one gazes at it.... Ah! do not doubt, one may look at a letter without reading it, as, methinks, I should still find some pleasure in touching your portrait in the night....

Your portrait, do I say? But a letter is the portrait of the soul. It has not, like a cold resemblance, that stagnation which is so remote from love; it lends itself to our every movement: by turns it is animated, feels enjoyment,

is in repose . . . . All your sentiments are so precious to me! Will you rob me of a means of cherishing them?

Are you sure, pray, that the need to write to me will never torment you? In solitude, if your heart expands or is depressed, if a movement of joy thrills through your soul, if an involuntary sadness, for a moment, troubles it: where will you depose your gladness or your sorrow, except upon the bosom of your friend? Will you, then, have a sentiment which he does not share? Will you allow yourself to be lost in solitary dreams apart? My love... my tender love! But it is your privilege to pronounce sentence. I did but wish to discuss, and not to beguile you; I do but give you reasons, I dare believe that my prayers had been of more avail. If you persist, therefore, I will endeavour not to grieve; I will make an effort to tell myself what you would have written to me: but, ah, you would say it better than I; and, above all, I should have more pleasure in hearing it.

Adieu, my charming friend; the hour is drawing nigh when I shall be able to see you: I take leave of you in all haste, that I may come and find you the sooner.

Paris, 3rd December, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIRST

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

I DO not suppose, Marquise, that you deem me so inexperienced as to have failed to set its due value upon the *tête-à-tête* in which I found you this evening, nor upon the *remarkable chance* which brought Danceny to your house! It is not that your practised countenance did not know marvellously well how to assume an expression of calm and serenity, nor that you betrayed yourself by any of those phrases which the lips of confusion or repentance sometimes let fall. I admit, also, that your docile gaze served you to perfection; and, if it had but known how to make itself believed as well as understood, far from feeling or retaining the least suspicion, I should not have suspected for a moment the extreme vexation caused you by that *importunate third party*. But, if you would not lavish such great talents in vain, if you would obtain the success you promised yourself, and produce, in short, the illusion you sought, you must begin by forming your novice of a lover with greater care.

Since you are beginning to undertake educations, teach your pupils not to blush and be put out of countenance at the slightest pleasantry; not to deny so earnestly, in the case of one woman only, the things against which

they defend themselves so feebly in the case of all the others. Teach them, again, how to listen to the praises of their mistress, without deeming themselves bound to do the honours for her; and, if you permit them to gaze at you in company, let them, at least, know beforehand how to disguise that look of possession, so easy to recognize, which they confound so clumsily with that of love. You will then be able to exhibit them in your public appearances, without their conduct putting their sage instructress to the blush; and I myself, only too happy to have a hand in your celebrity, promise to compose and publish the programmes of this new college.

But, until then, I am, I confess, astonished that it should be I whom you have chosen to treat like a school-boy. Oh, on any other woman how speedily I would be avenged! What a pleasure I should make of it! And how far it would surpass that of which she believed she had robbed me! Yes, it is, indeed, in your case alone that I can prefer reparation to revenge; and do not think that I am held back by the least doubt, the least uncertainty; I know all.

You have been in Paris for the last four days; and every day you have seen Danceny, and you have seen him only. Even to-day, your door was still closed; and your porter only failed to prevent my reaching you, for want of an assurance equal to your own. None the less, I was not to doubt, you wrote to me, that I should be the first to be informed of your arrival; of that arrival of which you could not yet tell me the date, although you wrote to me on the eve of your departure. Will you deny these facts, or will you attempt to excuse them? Either course is alike impossible; and yet I still contain myself! There you behold the force of your dominion: but

believe me, rest satisfied with having tried it, abuse it no more. We both know one another, Marquise: that word ought to suffice.

To-morrow, you told me, you will be out all day? Well and good, if you are really going out; and you may imagine that I shall know. But at any rate you will return in the evening; and, for our difficult reconciliation, the time betwixt then and the next morning will not be too long. Let me know then, if it is to be at your house, or in *the other place*, that our numerous and reciprocal expiations are to be made. Above all, no more of Danceny. Your naughty head was full of his idea, and I cannot be jealous of that frenzy of your imagination: but reflect that, from this moment, what was but a fantasy would become a marked preference. I do not think that I was made for such humiliations, and I do not expect to receive them from you.

I even hope that this sacrifice will not seem one to you. But, even if it should cost you anything, it seems to me that I have set you a fine enough example, and that a woman of sensibility and beauty, who lived for me alone, who, perhaps, at this very moment, is dying of love and regret, is worth at least as much as a young school-boy, who lacks, if you will, neither good-looks nor intelligence, but who, as yet, has neither constancy nor knowledge of the world!

Adieu, Marquise; I say nothing of my sentiments towards you. All that I can do, at this moment, is not to search my heart. I wait for your reply. Reflect, when you make it, reflect carefully that the easier it is for you to make me forget the offence you have given me, the more indelibly would a refusal on your part, a simple postponement even, engrave it upon my heart.

Paris, 3rd December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SECOND

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

PRAY, have a care, Vicomte, and shew more respect to my extreme timidity! How do you suppose that I can endure the overwhelming thought of incurring your wrath, and, above all, how can I fail to succumb to the fear of your vengeance? The more so in that, as you know, if you were to blacken me, it would be impossible for me to retaliate. I might speak, indeed, but your existence would be none the less brilliant and calm. In fact, what would you have to fear? To be sure, you would be obliged to leave, if the time were left you for it. But can one not live abroad as well as here? And all considered, provided that the Court of France left you in peace at whatever one you had chosen for your abode, it would merely be a case of shifting the scene of your triumphs. Having attempted to restore your coolness by these moral considerations, let us return to business.

Do you know, Vicomte, why I have never married again? It is not, assuredly, for lack of advantageous offers; it is solely in order that nobody should have the right to dictate my actions. It is not even that I was afraid of no longer being able to carry out my wishes, for I should always have ended by doing that; but that it

would have been a burden to me, that anyone should have had the right merely to complain of them; it is, in short, because I wished only to deceive for my pleasure, and not from necessity. And here you are, writing me the most marital letter that it is possible to receive! You speak to me of nothing but the injuries on my side, the favours on yours! But how, pray, can one be lacking to one to whom one owes no whit? I am unable to conceive it.

Let us consider: what is all this ado about? You found Danceny with me, and it displeased you? Well and good: but what conclusion can you have drawn from it? Either it was the result of chance, as I told you, or of my will, as I did not tell you. In the first case, your letter is unjust; in the second, it is ridiculous: it was indeed worth the trouble of writing! But you are jealous, and jealousy does not reason. Very well, let me reason for you.

Either you have a rival or you have not. If you have one, you must please, in order to be preferred to him; if you have not, you must still please, in order to avoid having one. In both cases the same conduct is to be observed: why, therefore, torment yourself? Above all, why torment me? Do you no longer know how to be the most amiable? And are you no longer sure of your successes? Come now, Vicomte, you do yourself an injustice. But it is not that; it is that, in your eyes, I am not worth your putting yourself to so much trouble. You are less desirous of my favours than you are of abusing your empire. There, you are an ingrate. That is enough sentiment, methinks, and if I were to continue a very little longer, this letter might well turn to tenderness: but that you do not deserve!

You deserve just as little that I should justify myself. To punish you for your suspicions, you shall retain them: of the time of my return, therefore, just as of the visits of Danceny, I shall tell you nothing. You have taken mighty pains to inform yourself, have you not? Very well! Are you any more advanced? I hope it has given you a great deal of pleasure; I can tell you, it has not interfered with mine.

All I can say, then, in reply to your threatening letter, is that it has had neither the fortune to please me, nor the power to intimidate me; and that, for the moment, I could not be less disposed than I am to grant your request.

In truth, to accept you such as you shew yourself to-day would be to commit a real infidelity to you. It would not be a renewal with my old lover; it would be to take a fresh one, and one by no means worth the old. I have not so far forgotten the first that I should so deceive myself. The Valmont whom I loved was charming. I will even admit that I have never encountered a man more amiable. Ah, let me beg you, Vicomte, if you find him again, to bring him to see me; he will be always well received!

Warn him, however, that in no case will it be for to-day or to-morrow. His Menæchmus has somewhat injured him; and, if I were in too much haste, I should be afraid of making a mistake; or, perhaps, if you like, I have pledged my word to Danceny for those two days! And your letter has taught me that it is no joking matter with you, when one breaks one's word. You see, then, that you must wait.

But what does it matter to you? You can always avenge yourself on your rival. He will do no worse to your mistress than you will do to his; and, after all, is not one



woman as good as another? She even who should be *tender and sensitive, who should live for you alone, who, in short, should die from love and regret*, would be, none the less, sacrificed to the first fantasy, to the dread of a moment's ridicule; and you would have one put one's self about? Ah, that is not fair!

Adieu, Vicomte; pray, become amiable once more. You see, I ask nothing better than to find you charming; and as soon as I am sure of it, I undertake to give you the proof. Truly, I am too kind.

Paris, 4th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-THIRD

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

I ANSWER your letter at once, and I will try to be clear; a thing which is not easy with you, when once you have made up your mind not to understand.

Long phrases were not required to establish the fact that, when each of us possesses all that is necessary to ruin the other, we have a like interest in mutual consideration: there is no question, therefore, of that. But, between the violent course of destroying one another, and that, doubtless the better, of remaining united as we have been, of becoming even more so by resuming our old *liaison*; between these two courses, I say, there are a thousand others to adopt. It was not ridiculous, therefore, to tell you, nor is it to repeat, that from this day forward I will be either your lover or your enemy.

I am admirably conscious that this choice will embarrass you; that it would suit you better to beat about the bush; and I am quite aware that you have never loved to be placed thus betwixt a plain yes or no: but you must also feel that I cannot let you out of this narrow circle without running the risk of being tricked; and you may have foreseen that I would not endure that. It is for you now to decide: I am able to leave you the choice, but not to remain in uncertainty.

I warn you only that you will not impose on me by your arguments, be they good or bad; that neither will you seduce me by any more of those cajoleries with which you seek to adorn your refusals; and that, at last, the time for frankness has arrived. I ask nothing better than to be able to set you the example; and I declare to you with pleasure, that I prefer peace and union: but, if both are to be broken, I believe the right and the means are mine.

I will add, then, that the least obstacle presented by you will be taken by me as a veritable declaration of war: you will see that the answer I exact from you requires neither long nor fine phrases. Two words will suffice.

Paris, 4th December, 17\*\*.

REPLY OF THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

(Written at the foot of the above letter)

Very well! War!

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FOURTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE.

THE bulletins will inform you better than I can do, my dear friend, of the grievous state of our patient. Utterly absorbed, as I am, in my care of her, I only snatch from it the time to write to you, when there are any incidents to relate, other than those of the malady. Here is one, for which I was certainly unprepared. It is a letter which I have received from M. de Valmont, who has been pleased to choose me as his confidant, or rather as his mediator with Madame de Tourvel, for whom he has also enclosed a letter in mine. I have sent back the one, and replied to the other. The latter I forward to you, and I think you will judge, like myself, that I could not and ought not to have complied with his request. Even had I been willing, our unfortunate friend would not have been in a condition to understand me. Her delirium is continuous. But what do you think of this despair of M. de Valmont? First, is one to believe in it, or does he but wish to deceive everybody, to the very end?<sup>1</sup> If, for once, he is sincere, he may well say that he has been

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<sup>1</sup> It is because we have discovered nothing in the subsequent correspondence which can solve this doubt that we have decided to suppress M. de Valmont's letter.

himself the cause of his own misfortune. I expect he will be hardly pleased with my answer; but I confess that all I see of this unhappy adventure excites me more and more against its author.

Adieu, my dear friend; I am going to resume my sad task, which becomes even more so from the scant hope I feel of seeing it succeed. You know my sentiments towards you.

Paris, 5th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIFTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

I HAVE called upon you twice, my dear Chevalier: but, since you have abandoned the *rôle* of lover to take up that of the man of gallant conquests, you have naturally become invisible. Your *valet-de-chambre*, however, assured me that you would return this evening; that he had orders to await you: but I, who am acquainted with your plans, understood quite well that you would only enter for a moment, to put on the suitable costume, and would promptly recommence your victorious progress. 'Tis very well, and I cannot but applaud you for it; but, perhaps, for this evening, you will be tempted to change your direction. As yet you do but know one half of your occupations; I must make you acquainted with the other, and then you shall decide. Take the time, then, to read my letter. It will not tend to distract you from your pleasures, since, on the contrary, it has no other object than to offer you a choice of them.

If I had possessed your whole confidence, if I had heard from yourself that part of your secrets which you have left me to divine, I should have been informed in time, and my zeal would have been less inopportune and would not impede your movements to-day. But let us start from



where we are. Whatever course you were to take, your rejected would always make another happy.

You have a *rendez-vous* to-night, have you not? With a charming woman, whom you adore? For, at your age, who is the woman one does not adore, at least for the first week! The setting of the scene must enhance your pleasures. A delicious *petite-maison*, which has been taken only for you, is to adorn voluptuousness with the charms of liberty and of mystery. All is arranged; you are expected, and you burn to betake yourself there! We both know that, although you have said no word of it to me. Now, here is what you do not know, and what I have to tell you.

Since my return to Paris, I have been busy over the means of bringing you and Mademoiselle de Volanges together; I promised you this; and on the very last occasion when I spoke of it to you, I had reason to judge from your replies, I might say from your transports, that in this I was promoting your happiness. I could not succeed in this difficult enterprise by myself alone: but, after preparing the means, I left the rest to the zeal of your young mistress. Her love has discovered resources which my experience lacked: in short, it is your misfortune that she has succeeded. Two days since, as she told me this evening, every obstacle was surmounted, and your happiness only depends on yourself.

For two days, also, she flattered herself that she would be able to give you this news herself, and, in spite of her Mamma's absence, you would have been received: but you have not even presented yourself! And, to tell you the truth, whether it be reason or caprice, the little person seemed to me somewhat vexed at this lack of eagerness

on your part. At last, she found a means of summoning me to her, and made me promise to forward the enclosed letter to you as soon as possible. From the emphasis she laid upon it, I would wager it is a question of a *rendez-vous* for to-night. Be that as it may, I promised upon my honour and my friendship that you should have the tender missive in the course of to-day, and I cannot and will not break my word.

Now, young man, what is your conduct to be? Placed between coquetry and love, between pleasure and happiness, which will be your choice? If I were speaking to the Danceny of three months ago, nay, even of a week ago, I should be as certain of his behaviour as I was of his heart: but the Danceny of to-day, led away by the women, running after adventures, and grown, as the usage is, somewhat of a rake, will he prefer a very shy young girl, who only offers him her beauty, her innocence and her love, to the attractions of a woman who is certainly very *well-worn*?

For my part, my dear friend, it seems to me that, even with your new principles, which, I quite admit, are shared also in some degree by myself, I should decide, under the circumstances, for the younger flame. To begin with, it is one the more, and then the novelty, and again the fear of losing the fruit of your labour by neglecting to cull it; for, on that side, in short, it would be really an opportunity missed, and it does not always return, especially in the case of a first frailty: when such are in question, often it needs but one moment of ill-humour, one jealous suspicion, less even, to prevent the most handsome triumph. Drowning virtue sometimes clings to a straw; and, once escaped, it keeps upon its guard and is no longer easily surprised.

On the other side, on the contrary, what do you risk? Not even a rupture; a quarrel at the most, whereby you purchase, at the cost of a few attentions, the pleasure of a reconciliation. What other course remains for a woman who has already given herself, save that of indulgence? What would she gain by severity? The loss of her pleasures, with no profit to her glory.

If, as I assume, you choose the path of love, which seems to me also that of reason, I should consider it prudent to send no excuses to the *rendez-vous*; let yourself be expected quite simply: if you risk giving a reason, there will perhaps be a temptation to verify it. Women are curious and obstinate; all might be discovered; as you know, I am myself just now an example of this. But, if you leave a hope, as it will be sustained by vanity, it will not be lost until long after the proper hour for seeking information: then, to-morrow, you will be able to select the insurmountable obstacle which will have detained you; you will have been ill, dead if necessary, or anything else which will have caused you equal despair; and all will be right again.

For the rest, whichever course you adopt, I only ask you to inform me of it; and, as I have no interest in the matter, I shall in any case think that you have done well. Adieu, my dear friend.

I add one thing more, that I regret Madame de Tourvel; that I am in despair at being separated from her; that I would pay with half my life for the privilege of consecrating the other half to her. Ah, believe me, love is one's only happiness!

Paris, 5th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SIXTH

CÉCILE VOLANGES TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

(Enclosed in the preceding)

How is it, my dear friend, that I see you no longer, when I never cease to desire it? Do you no longer care so much about it as I do? Ah, nowadays I am very sad indeed! Sadder even than when we were entirely separated. The pain I once had through others comes now from you, and that hurts far more.

You know quite well that it is some days since Mamma has been away from home, and I hoped you would try and profit by this time of freedom: but you do not even think of me; I am very unhappy! You told me so often that my love was less than yours! I knew the contrary, and here is the proof. If you had come to see me, you would have seen me indeed: for I am not like you; I only think of what will reunite us. If you had your deserts, I would not say anything of all I have done for that, and of the trouble it has given me: but I love you too well, and I wish so much to see you that I cannot refrain from telling you. And then, I shall soon see afterwards if you really love me!

I have managed so well, that the porter is in our interests, and has promised me that, whenever you came, he

would let you in, as though he did not see you; and we can depend upon him, for he is a very obliging man. It is only a question, then, of keeping out of sight in the house; and that is very easy, if you come at night, when there is nothing at all to fear. For instance, since Mamma has been going out every day, she goes to bed every night at eleven o'clock; so that we should have plenty of time.

The porter told me that, if you should come like that, instead of knocking on the gate, you would only have to knock at his window, and he would open at once to you; and then, you will easily find the back staircase; and, as you will not be able to have a light, I will leave the door of my room ajar, which will always give you a little light. You must take great care not to make any noise, especially in passing Mamma's back door. As for my maid's, that is no matter, as she has promised me not to awake; she is a very good girl, too! And to leave, it will be just the same. Now we shall see if you will come.

Ah God, why does my heart beat so fast while I write to you? Is some misfortune going to come to me, or is it the hope of seeing you which troubles me like this? What I feel most is that I have never loved you so much, and have never longed so much to tell you so. Come then, my friend, my dear friend, that I may be able to repeat to you a hundred times that I love you, that I adore you, that I shall never love anyone but you.

I have found the means of informing M. de Valmont that I had something to say to him; and, as he is a very good friend, he is sure to come to-morrow, and I will beg him to give you this letter immediately. So that I

shall expect you to-morrow night, and you will come without fail, if you would not make your Cécile very unhappy.

Adieu, my dear friend; I embrace you with all my heart.

Paris, 4th December, 17\*\*, in the evening.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED FIFTY-SEVENTH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Do not doubt, my dear Vicomte, either of my heart or of my proceedings! How could I resist a desire of my dear Cécile's? Ah, it is indeed she, she alone whom I love, whom I shall always love! Her ingenuousness, her tenderness have a charm for me from which I may have been weak enough to allow myself to be distracted, but which nothing will ever efface. Embarked upon another adventure without, so to speak, having perceived it, often has the memory of Cécile come to trouble me, in the midst of my sweetest pleasures; and, perhaps, my heart has never rendered her truer homage than at the very moment I was unfaithful to her. However, my friend, let us spare her delicacy and hide my wrong-doings from her; not to surprise her, but so as not to give her pain. Cécile's happiness is the most ardent vow that I frame; I would never forgive myself a fault which had cost her a tear.

I feel I have deserved your jesting remarks upon what you call my new principles: but you can believe me when I say that it is not by them I am guided at this moment; and from to-morrow I am determined to prove it. I will go and accuse myself to the very woman who has been the cause of my error, who has participated in it; I will say

to her, "Read my heart; it has the most tender friendship for you; friendship united to desire so greatly resembles love!... Both of us have been deceived; but, though susceptible to error, I am not capable of a breach of faith." I know my friend; she is as noble as she is indulgent; she will do more than pardon me, she will approve. She herself often reproached herself with betraying friendship; often her delicacy took alarm at her love. Wiser than I, she will strengthen in my soul those useful fears which I rashly sought to stifle in hers. I shall owe it to her that I am better, as to you that I am happier. O my friends, divide my gratitude. The idea that I owe my happiness to you enhances its value.

Adieu, my dear Vicomte. The excess of my joy does not prevent me from thinking of your sorrows, and from sharing them. Why can I not be of use to you! Does Madame de Tourvel remain inexorable then? I am told also that she is very ill. God, how I pity you! May she regain at the same time her health and her indulgence, and for ever make your happiness! These are the prayers of friendship; I dare hope that they will be heard by Love.

I should like to talk longer with you; but the hour approaches, and perhaps Cécile already awaits me.

Paris, 5th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-EIGHTH

THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT TO THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL

(Upon awaking)

WELL, well, Marquise, how are you after the pleasures of last night? Are you not somewhat fatigued by them? Admit now, that Danceny is charming! He performs prodigies, this youth! You did not expect it of him, am I not right? Indeed, I will do myself justice; I richly deserved to be sacrificed to such a rival. Seriously, he is full of good qualities! But, above all, what love, what constancy, what delicacy! Ah, if you were ever to be loved by him as his Cécile is, you would have no rivals to fear: he proved that to you last night. Perhaps, by dint of coquetry, another woman may rob you of him for a moment; a young man can hardly refuse enticing provocations: but a single word from the beloved object suffices, as you see, to dispel this illusion; thus you have only to be that object in order to become perfectly happy.

You will surely make no mistake there; you have too sure a tact that you need ever fear that. However, the friendship which unites us, as sincere on my part as it is recognized on yours, made me desire for you the experience

of last night. It is the work of my zeal; it has succeeded: but I pray you, no thanks; it is not worth the pains: nothing could have been easier.

In fact, what did it cost me? A slight sacrifice, and a little skill. I consented to share the favours of his mistress with the young man: but, after all, he has as much right to them as I; and I took such scant account of them! The letter which the young person wrote to him was, of course, dictated by me; but it was only to gain time, because we had a better use for it. The one I added to it, oh, that was nothing, next to nothing; a few friendly reflexions to guide the new lover's choice: but, upon my honour, they were not required; the truth must be told, he did not hesitate for an instant.

Moreover, in his candour, he is to go to you to-day, to tell you everything; and assuredly the story will please you mightily! He will say to you: "*Read my heart*;" this he has told me: and you quite see that that repairs everything. I hope that, while reading what he would have, you will also perhaps read that such young lovers have their dangers; and again, that it is better to have me for a friend than an enemy.

Adieu, Marquise; until the next occasion.

Paris, 6th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-NINTH

THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

I DO not like people to follow up sorry conduct with sorry jests; it is neither in my manner nor to my taste. When I have ground of complaint against people, I do not quiz them; I do better, I avenge myself. However satisfied with yourself you may be at the present moment, do not forget that it would not be the first time if you were to find that you were premature, and quite alone, in applauding yourself in the hope of a triumph which had escaped you at the very moment when you were congratulating yourself upon it. Adieu.

Paris, 6th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTIETH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I WRITE to you from the chamber of your unhappy friend, whose state has remained almost always the same. There is to be a consultation of four physicians this afternoon. That is, unhappily, as you know, more often a proof of danger than a means of relief.

It seems, however, that her mind was somewhat restored last night. The waiting-maid informed me this morning that just before midnight her mistress called her; that she wished to be alone with her; and that she dictated to her a fairly long letter. Julie added that, whilst she was busy in making the envelope for it, Madame de Tourvel's delirium returned: so that the girl did not know to whom she was to address it. I was astonished, at first, that the letter itself had not been sufficient to inform her; upon which she answered me that she feared to make a mistake; that her mistress, however, had greatly charged her to have it dispatched immediately. I took upon myself to open the packet.

I found there the communication which I send you, which, in fact, is addressed to everybody and to nobody. I think, however, that it was to M. de Valmont that our unhappy friend meant at first to write; but that she gave



way, without perceiving it, to the disorder of her ideas. Be that as it may, I judged that the letter should not be given to anybody. I send it you, because you will learn from it, better than you can from me, what are the thoughts which fill our patient's head. As long as she remains so keenly affected, I shall have no hope. The body recovers with difficulty, when the mind is so ill at ease.

Adieu, my dear and revered friend. I congratulate you upon being at a distance from the sad spectacle which is continually before my eyes.

Paris, 6th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIRST

THE PRÉSIDENTE DE TOURVEL TO —

(Dictated by her and written by her waiting-maid)

CRUEL and wicked being, will you never cease to persecute me? Does it not suffice you to have tortured, degraded, vilified me? Would you ravish from me even the peace of the grave? What! In this abode of shadow, where ignominy has forced me to bury myself, are my sorrows to be without cessation, is hope to be unknown? I do not implore for mercy, which I do not deserve: to suffer without complaining, I shall be content if my sufferings do not exceed my strength. But do not render my torments unbearable. In leaving me my sorrow, take away from me the cruel memory of the good I have lost. When you have ravished it from me, trace no more before my eyes its desolating image. I was innocent and at peace: because I saw you, I lost my repose; by listening to you I became criminal. Author of my faults, what right have you to punish them?

Where are the friends who cherished me, where are they? My misfortune has terrified them. None dares come near me. I am borne down, and they leave me without succour! I am dying, and no one weeps over me. All consolation is refused me. Pity stops short

on the brink of the abyss into which the guilty one has plunged. She is torn by remorse and her cries are not heeded!

And you, whom I have outraged; you, whose esteem adds to my punishment; you, who alone would have the right to avenge yourself on me, what are you doing far away from me? Come and punish an unfaithful wife. Let me suffer, at last, the torments I have deserved. I should have already submitted to your vengeance: but the courage failed me to tell you of your shame. It was not dissimulation, it was respect. Let this letter, at least, tell you of my repentance. Heaven has taken your part; it avenges you for a wrong you do not know. 'Tis Heaven which has tied my tongue and retained my words; it feared lest you should remit a fault which it wished to punish. It has withdrawn me from your indulgence, which would have infringed its justice.

Pitiless in its vengeance, it has abandoned me to the very one who ruined me. It is at once for him and through him that I suffer. I seek to flee him in vain; he follows me; he is there; he assails me unceasingly. But how different he is from himself! His eyes express naught but hatred and contempt. His lips proffer only insults and reproach. His arms are only thrown round me to destroy me. Who will save me from his barbarous fury?

But what! It is he . . . . I am not mistaken; it is he whom I see once more. O my beloved, take me in your arms; hide me in your bosom: yes, it is you, it is indeed you! What dread illusion made me misunderstand you? How I have suffered in your absence! Let us part no more, let us never part again. Let me breathe. Feel my heart, how it throbs! Ah, it is with fear no

longer, it is the soft emotion of love! Why do you turn away from my tender caresses? Cast your sweet glance upon me! What are those bonds you are trying to break? Why are you getting ready those preparations for death? What can change your features thus? What are you doing? Leave me: I shudder! God! It is that monster again! My friends, do not desert me. You, who urged me to fly from him, help me to struggle against him; and you, more indulgent, who promised me a diminution of my pains, come to my side. Where have you both gone? If I am not allowed to see you again, at least, answer this letter: let me know that you still love me.

Leave me then, cruel one! What fresh fury seizes you? Do you fear lest any gentle sentiment should penetrate my soul? You redouble my torments; you force me to hate you. Oh, what a grievous thing is hatred! How it corrodes the heart which distils it! Why do you persecute me? What more can you have to say to me? Have you not made it as impossible for me to listen to you as to answer you? Expect nothing more of me. Monsieur, farewell.

Paris, 5th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SECOND

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT

I AM acquainted, Monsieur, with your behaviour to me. I know also that, not content with having unworthily tricked me, you have not feared to vaunt and applaud yourself for it. I have seen the proof of your treachery written in your own hand. I confess that my heart was sick, and that I felt a certain shame at having assisted somewhat myself at the odious abuse you have made of my blind confidence: I do not, however, envy you this shameful advantage; I am only curious to learn whether you will preserve them all alike over me. I shall know this if, as I hope, you will be ready to meet me to-morrow, between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, at the entrance to the Bois de Vincennes by the village of Saint-Mandé. I will be careful to have there all that is necessary for the explanations which I still have to obtain from you.

The Chevalier DANCENY.

Paris, 6th December, 17\*\*, in the evening.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-THIRD

M. BERTRAND TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

MADAME,

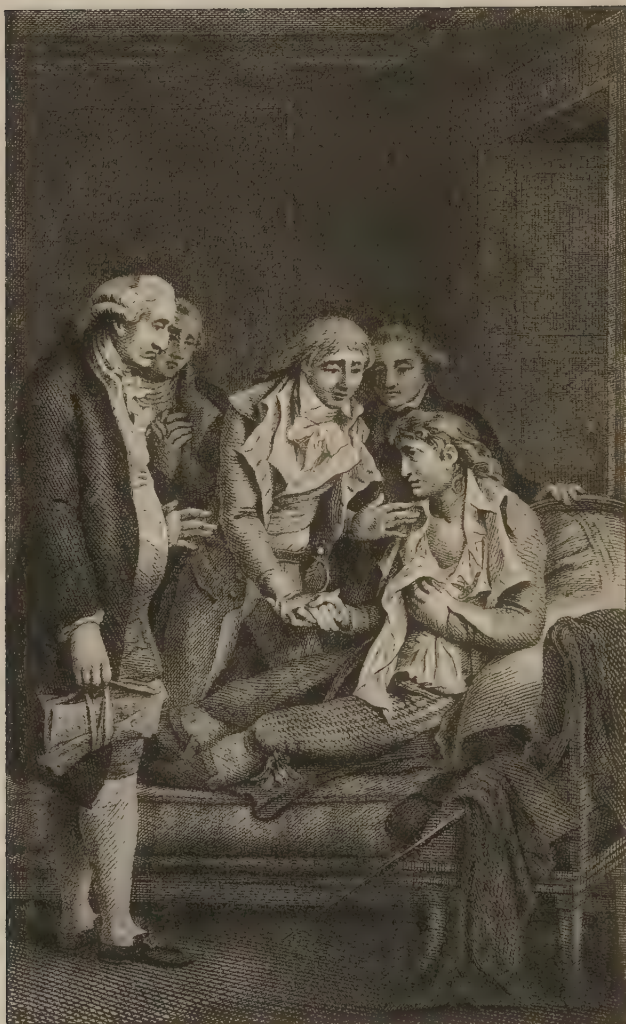
IT is with great regret that I undertake the sad task of announcing to you news which will cause you such cruel sorrow. Allow me, first, to recommend to you that pious resignation which we have all so much admired in you, and which alone enables us to support the ills with which our wretched life is strewn.

Your nephew . . . . Gracious Heaven! Must I afflict so greatly so venerable a lady! Your nephew has had the misfortune to fall in a remarkable duel which he had this morning with M. le Chevalier Danceny. I am entirely ignorant of the motive of this quarrel; but it appears, from the missive which I found still in the pocket of M. le Vicomte, and which I have the honour to forward you; it appears, I say, that he was not the aggressor. Yet it needs must be he whom Heaven allowed to fall!

I had been to wait upon M. le Vicomte, precisely at the hour when he was brought back to the *hôtel*. Imagine my terror, when I saw your nephew carried by two of his servants, and bathed in his blood. He had two sword-thrusts through his body, and was already very weak. M. Danceny was there also, and he even wept. Ah,







M<sup>re</sup> Gerard del.

Simonet sculp<sup>t</sup>

certainly, he has reason to weep: but it is a fine time to shed tears, when one has caused an irreparable misfortune!

As for me, I could not contain myself; and, in spite of my humble condition, I none the less told him my fashion of thinking. But it was then that M. le Vicomte showed himself truly great. He ordered me to be silent; and, taking the hand of the very man who was his murderer, he called him his friend, embraced him before us all and said to us, "I command you to treat Monsieur with all the consideration that is due to a brave and gallant man." He further caused him to be presented, in my presence, with a voluminous mass of papers, the contents of which I am not acquainted with, but to which I am well aware he attached vast importance. He then desired that we should leave them alone together for a moment. Meanwhile, I had sent in search of every kind of succour, both spiritual and temporal: but, alas, the ill was incurable! Less than half-an-hour later, M. le Vicomte lost consciousness. He was only able to receive extreme unction; and the ceremony was hardly over, when he rendered his last breath.

Great God! When I received in my arms, at his birth, this precious prop of so illustrious a house, how little did I foresee that it was to be in my arms that he would expire, and that I should have to weep for his death! A death so premature and so unfortunate! My tears flow in spite of myself. I ask your pardon, Madame, for thus daring to mingle my grief with your own: but, in every condition, we have hearts and sensibility; and I should be ungrateful, indeed, if I did not weep all my life for a lord who shewed me so much kindness, and honoured me with so great confidence.

To-morrow, after the removal of the body, I will have

the seals placed on everything, and you can depend entirely on my care. You will be aware, Madame, that this unhappy event cuts off the entail, and leaves the disposition of your property entirely free. If I can be of any use to you, I beg you to be good enough to convey to me your orders: I will employ all my zeal in their punctual fulfilment.

I remain, with the most profound respect, Madame, your most humble, etc.

BERTRAND.

Paris, 7th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FOURTH

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO M. BERTRAND

I HAVE this moment received your letter, my dear Bertrand, and learn from it the fearful event of which my nephew has been the unhappy victim. Yes, I shall doubtless have orders to give you, and it is only on account of them that I can occupy myself with anything else than my mortal affliction.

The letter of M. Danceny, which you have sent me, is a very convincing proof that it was he who provoked the duel, and it is my intention that you should immediately lodge a complaint, and in my name. My nephew may have satisfied his natural generosity in pardoning his enemy and murderer; but it is my duty to avenge, at the same time, his death, humanity and religion. One cannot be too eager to invoke the severity of the law against this remnant of barbarism, and I do not believe that this is a case in which we are required to pardon injuries. I expect you, then, to pursue this matter with all the zeal and activity of which I know you to be capable, and which you owe to my nephew's memory.

You will be sure, before all, to see M. le Président de \*\*\* on my behalf, and confer with him on the subject. I have not written to him, eager as I am to be left quite

alone with my sorrow. You will convey him my excuses, and communicate this letter to him.

Adieu, my dear Bertrand; I praise and thank you for your kind sentiments, and am, for life, entirely yours.

At the Château de . . . , 8th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIFTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I KNOW you are already acquainted, my dear and revered friend, with the loss you have just sustained; I knew your affection for M. de Valmont, and I participate most sincerely in the affliction which you must feel. I am truly grieved to have to add a fresh regret to those which are trying you already: but, alas! you have only your tears now to bestow upon our unhappy friend. We lost her yesterday, at eleven o'clock at night. By a fatality which attended her lot, and which seemed to make a mock of all human prudence, the short interval by which she survived M. de Valmont sufficed to inform her of his death; and, as she herself said, to enable her not to succumb beneath the weight of her misfortunes until the measure of them was full.

You are aware, of course, that for more than two days she was absolutely without consciousness; and even yesterday morning, when her physician arrived, and we approached her bedside, she recognized neither of us, and we could not extract the least word or sign from her. Well, hardly had we returned to the chimney, and the physician was relating to me the sad episode of M. de Valmont's death, when the unfortunate woman recovered her reason,



whether that nature alone had produced this revolution, or that it was caused by the repetition of the words, *M. de Valmont* and *death*, which may have brought back to the patient the only ideas which have occupied her for a long time.

However that may be, she hurriedly threw back the curtains of her bed, crying out, "What? What are you saying? *M. de Valmont* is dead!" I hoped to make her believe that she was mistaken, and at first assured her that she had heard wrong: but far from letting herself be persuaded, she required the physician to repeat the cruel story, and, upon my endeavouring again to dissuade her, she called me and whispered, "Why wish to deceive me? Was he not already dead to me?" It was necessary, therefore, to yield.

Our unhappy friend listened, at first, with a fairly tranquil air: but soon afterwards, she interrupted the story, saying, "Enough, I know enough." She asked at once for her curtains to be closed; and, when the physician subsequently tried to busy himself with the care of her condition, she never would have him near her.

As soon as he had left, she similarly dismissed her nurse and waiting-maid; and when we were left alone, she begged me to help her to kneel down upon her bed, and support her so. There she stayed for some time in silence, and with no other expression than that which was given by her tears, which flowed copiously. At last, clasping her hands, and raising them to Heaven: "Almighty God," said she, in a weak but fervent voice, "I submit myself to Thy justice; but forgive *Valmont*. Let not my misfortunes, which I admit are deserved, be a cause of reproach to him, and I will bless Thy mercy!" I have permitted myself, my dear and respected friend, to





M.<sup>lle</sup> Gerard del.

Encre saulp.

enter into these details on a subject which I am well aware must renew and aggravate your grief, because I have no doubt that that prayer of Madame de Tourvel's will, nevertheless, be a great consolation to your soul. After our friend had uttered these brief words, she fell back in my arms; and she was hardly replaced in her bed, when she was overcome by weakness, which lasted long, but which gave way to the ordinary remedies. As soon as she had regained consciousness, she asked me to send for the Père Anselme, and added, "He is now the only physician whom I need; I feel that my ills will soon be ended." She complained much of oppression, and spoke with difficulty.

A short time afterwards, she handed me, through her waiting-maid, a casket which I am sending to you, which she tells me contains papers of hers, and which she charged me to convey to you immediately after her death.<sup>1</sup> She next spoke to me of you, and of your friendship for her, so far as her situation permitted, and with much emotion.

The Père Anselme arrived about four o'clock, and remained alone with her for nearly an hour. When we returned, the face of the sick woman was calm and serene; but it was easy to see that the Père Anselme had shed many tears. He remained to assist at the last ceremonies of the Church. This spectacle, always so imposing and so sorrowful, was rendered even more so by the contrast which the tranquil resignation of the sufferer formed with the profound grief of her venerable confessor, who burst into tears at her side. The emotion became general; and she, for whom everybody wept, was the only one not to weep.

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<sup>1</sup> This casket contained all the letters relating to her adventure with M. de Valmont.

troubles I greatly dread. I hope that you will pardon this liberty in consideration of my attachment and my zeal.

I am, with respect, Madame, your, etc.

Paris, 10th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SEVENTH

ANONYMOUS TO M. LE CHEVALIER DANCENY

MONSIEUR,

I HAVE the honour to inform you that this morning, in the corridors of the Court, there was talk amongst the King's officers of the affair which you had a few days ago with M. le Vicomte de Valmont, and that it is to be feared that the Government will take proceedings against you. I thought that this warning might be of use to you, either to enable you to seek out what protection you have, to ward off these vexatious results; or, in the event of your being unable to succeed in this, to put you in a position to take measures for your personal safety.

If you will even permit me to give you a piece of advice, I think you would do well to show yourself less often than you have done during the last few days. Although, ordinarily, affairs of this sort are treated with indulgence, this respect nevertheless continues due to the law.

This precaution becomes all the more necessary in that it has come to my ears that a certain Madame de Rosemonde, who, I am told, is an aunt of M. de Valmont, wished to lodge a complaint against you, in which event the public officers could not refuse her requisition. It

would not be amiss, perhaps, if you were able to communicate with this lady.

Private reasons prevent me from signing this letter. But I am acting on the consideration that you will not render less justice to the sentiment which has dictated it, because you know not from whom it comes.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Paris, 10th December, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-EIGHTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

MOST surprising and distressing rumours, my dear and revered friend, are being disseminated here in relation to Madame de Merteuil. I am, assuredly, very far from believing them, and I would wager well that it is nothing but a hideous calumny: but I am too well aware of the ease with which even the most improbable slanders acquire credit, and of the difficulty with which the impression they leave is effaced, not to be greatly alarmed at these, easy as I believe it to be to refute them. I should wish, above all, that they could be stopped in good time, before they have spread further. But I only knew yesterday, at a late hour, of these horrors which they were fast beginning to retail; and when I sent this morning to Madame de Merteuil, she had just left for the country, where she was to spend two days. They were not able to tell me to whom she had gone. Her second woman, whom I sent for to speak with me, told me that her mistress had left no orders save that she was to be expected on Thursday next; and none of the servants whom she has left here know any more. For myself, I have no notion where she may be; I cannot recollect any person of her acquaintance who stays so late in the country.

However that may be, you will be able, I hope, between now and her return, to furnish me with information which will be of use to her: for these odious stories are based on the circumstances of M. de Valmont's death; you are likely to have been informed of them, if they are true; or, at any rate, it will be easy for you to obtain information, which I beg you to do. This is what is being published, or rather, whispered, at present; but it will certainly not be long before it spreads further:

It is said that the quarrel between M. de Valmont and the Chevalier Danceny was the work of Madame de Merteuil, who deceived them both alike; that, as happens almost always, the two rivals began by fighting and only arrived at explanations afterwards; that these explanations brought about a sincere reconciliation; and that, in order to expose Madame de Merteuil to the Chevalier Danceny, and also to justify himself entirely, M. de Valmont supported his revelations by a heap of letters, forming a regular correspondence which he had maintained with her, and in which she relates the most scandalous anecdotes about herself, and in the freest of styles.

People further say that Danceny, in the first heat of his indignation, shewed these letters to all who wished to see them, and that they are now making the round of Paris. Two of them, in particular, are quoted: <sup>1</sup> one in which she relates the whole history of her life and principles, and which is said to attain the height of horror; the other which entirely justifies M. de Prévan, whose story you will remember, by the proof it contains that all he did was to yield to the most marked advances on the part

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<sup>1</sup> Letters the eighty-first and eighty-fifth of this collection.

of Madame de Merteuil, and that the *rendez-vous* was arranged with her.

I have, happily, the strongest reasons to believe that these imputations are as false as they are odious. First, we are both aware that M. de Valmont was assuredly not occupied with Madame de Merteuil, and I have every cause to believe that Danceny was equally without interest in her: thus it seems to me clearly proved that she can have been neither the motive nor the author of the quarrel. I equally fail to understand what interest Madame de Merteuil can have had, assuming her to have been in concert with M. de Prévan, in making a scene which could only be disagreeable by its publicity, and which might become most dangerous to her, since she made, thereby, an irreconcilable enemy of a man who was master in part of her secret, and who, at that time, had numerous partisans. However, it is remarkable that since that adventure not a single voice has been raised in Prévan's favour, and that even from his own side there has been no protest made.

These reflections would lead me to suspect the author of the rumours which are abroad to-day, and to look upon these slanders as the work of the hatred and vengeance of a man who, knowing himself to be ruined, hopes, by such a means, at least to establish a doubt, and perhaps cause a useful diversion. But, from whatever source these malicious reports arise, the most urgent thing is to destroy them. They would cease of themselves, if it were to be shewn, as is probable, that MM. de Valmont and Danceny had no communication after their unfortunate affair, and that no papers passed between them.

In my impatience to verify these facts, I sent this

morning to M. Danceny; he is not in Paris either. His people told my *valet-de-chambre* that he had left in the night, owing to a warning he had received yesterday, and that the place of his sojourn was a secret. Apparently he is afraid of the results of his duel. 'Tis through you alone, then, my dear and revered friend, that I can be informed of the details which interest me, and which may become so necessary to Madame de Merteuil. I renew my prayer to you to acquaint me with them as soon as possible.

P.S. My daughter's indisposition has had no consequences; she presents her respects to you.

Paris, 11th December, 17 \*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-NINTH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

MADAME,

PERHAPS you will think the step I am taking to-day very unusual: but I entreat you to hear before you judge me, and to see neither boldness nor temerity, where only respect and confidence is meant. I do not deny the injury I have done you; and I should not pardon myself for it, all my life, if I could think for a moment that it had been possible for me to avoid it. Be even persuaded, Madame, that, if I am exempt from reproach, I am not equally so from regrets; and I may add, with equal sincerity, that those which I have caused you count for much in those which I feel. In order to believe in these sentiments of which I venture to assure you, it will suffice for you to render justice to yourself, and to reflect that, without having the honour of being known to you, I have, however, that of knowing you.

Meanwhile, whilst I groan over the fatality which has been the cause at once of your grief and my misfortunes, I have been led to fear that, absorbed in your vengeance, you would seek out means of gratifying it, even through the severity of the laws. Allow me, first, to point out to you, on this subject, that here you are led astray by

your sorrow, since my interest in this matter is essentially at one with that of M. de Valmont, and that he would himself be involved in the condemnation which you would have provoked against me. I believe then, Madame, that I can count on assistance, rather than on obstacles, on your part, in any efforts I may be obliged to make, so that this unhappy event may remain buried in silence.

But this resource of complicity, which befits the innocent and the guilty alike, is not sufficient for my delicacy: while desiring to remove you as a party to the suit, I demand you as my judge. The esteem of persons whom we respect is too precious that I should let yours be taken from me without defending it, and I believe I possess the means.

In fact, if you will admit that vengeance is allowed, or say rather, that it is one's bounden duty, when one has been betrayed in one's love, in one's friendship, and, above all, in one's confidence; if you admit this, my wrongs against you will vanish from your eyes. Do not take my word for this; but read, if you have the courage, the correspondence which I place in your hands.<sup>1</sup> The quantity of original letters which it contains seems to lend authenticity to those of which only copies exist. For the rest, I received these letters, just as I have the honour to forward them to you, from M. de Valmont himself. I have added nothing to them, and I have only

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<sup>1</sup> It is from this correspondence, from that handed over in the same way on the death of Madame de Tourvel, and from the letters alike confided to Madame de Rosemonde by Madame de Volanges, that the present collection has been formed, the originals of which remain in the hands of Madame de Rosemonde's heirs.

extracted two letters which I have permitted myself to publish.

One of these was necessary to the common vengeance of M. de Valmont and of myself; to this we had both a right, and I had been expressly charged with it by him. I thought, moreover, that I was rendering a service to society, in unmasking a woman so really dangerous as is Madame de Merteuil, who, as you will see, was the sole and veritable cause of all that passed between M. de Valmont and myself.

A feeling of justice also induced me to publish the second, for the justification of M. de Prévan, whom I hardly know, but who had in no way merited the rigorous treatment which he has experienced, nor the still more redoubtable judgment of the public, beneath which he has been groaning, ever since, without any means of defence.

You will only find copies, then, of these two letters, the originals of which I owe it to myself to keep. For all the rest, I do not believe I can remit in surer hands a deposit the destruction of which is not, perhaps, to my interest, but which I should blush to abuse. I believe, Madame, that, in confiding these papers to you, I am serving the persons interested in them, as well as if I remitted them to themselves; and I spare them the embarrassment of receiving them from me, and of knowing me to be informed of adventures of which they doubtless desire all the world to remain ignorant.

I think I ought to warn you, on this subject, that the adjoined correspondence only forms part of a far more voluminous collection, from which M. de Valmont extracted it in my presence, and which you will find, on the removal



of the seals, under the title, which I saw, of "*Account opened between the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont.*" You will adopt, in this matter, whatever course your prudence may suggest.

I am with respect, Madame, etc.

P.S. Certain information which I have received, and the advice of my friends, have decided my absence from Paris for some time: but the place of my retreat, which is kept a secret for everybody, will not be one for you. If you honour me with a reply, I beg you to address it to the Commanderie de . . . . by P . . . , under cover to M. le Commandeur de \*\*\*. It is from his house that I have the honour to write to you.

Paris, 12th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTIETH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

I MOVE, my dear friend, from surprise to surprise and from sorrow to sorrow. One must be a mother to form an idea of what I suffered yesterday all the morning: and, if my most cruel anxiety has been calmed since, there still remains to me a keen affliction, the end of which I cannot foresee.

Yesterday, about ten o'clock in the morning, astonished that I had not yet seen my daughter, I sent my waiting-maid to know what could have occasioned her delay. She returned a moment later, highly alarmed, and alarmed me even more by informing me that my daughter was not in her apartment, and that, since the morning, her maid had not seen her there. Judge of my situation! I summoned all my people, and the porter in especial: all swore to me they knew nothing, and could give me no information upon this event. I went at once to my daughter's room. The disorder which obtained there assured me that she had apparently only gone that morning: but I found no further clue. I searched her presses, her writing-desk; I found everything in its place and all her wardrobe, with the exception of the dress in which she had left. She had not even taken the small stock of money which she possessed.

As she had only heard yesterday of all that is said of Madame de Merteuil; as she is greatly attached to her, to such a degree, indeed, that she did naught but weep all the evening; as I remembered also, that she did not know Madame de Merteuil was in the country, my first idea was that she had wished to see her friend, and had been so imprudent as to go alone. But the time which elapsed before her return brought back all my uneasiness. Each moment augmented my trouble, and, burning as I was for information, I dared take no steps to obtain it, for fear of giving publicity to a proceeding which, afterwards, I might wish, perhaps, to be able to hide from everybody. Never in my life have I so suffered.

Finally, it was not until past two o'clock, I received at the same time a letter from my daughter and one from the Superior of the Convent of . . . . My daughter's letter only said that she had feared lest I should oppose the vocation, which she felt, to become a nun, and that she had not dared speak to me of it: the rest only consisted of excuses for the course she had adopted without my permission, which I would assuredly not disapprove of, she added, if I knew her motives, into which she begged me, however, not to enquire.

The Superior wrote to me that, seeing a young person arrive alone, she had at first refused to receive her; but that, having questioned her and learned who she was, she had thought to do me a service by giving my daughter shelter, in order not to expose her to further journeys, upon which she seemed resolved. The Superior, while offering, as a matter of course, to restore my daughter to me, if I were to demand her, urges me, obeying her condition, not to oppose a vocation which she declares

to be firm; she told me also that she could not inform me earlier of this event, owing to the difficulty she had in making my daughter write to me, as her plan was to leave everyone in ignorance of the place of her retreat. It is a cruel thing when our children argue so ill!

I went immediately to the convent; and, after seeing the Superior, asked to see my daughter; she only came reluctantly, and in a very tremulous state. I spoke to her before the nuns, and I spoke to her alone: all that I could extract from her, amid many tears, was that she could only be happy in the convent; I decided to let her remain there, but without entering the rank of postulants, as she desired. I fear that the deaths of Madame de Tourvel and M. de Valmont have unduly affected her young head. Whatever my respect for a religious vocation, I could not see my daughter embrace that career without sorrow, and even without alarm. Methinks we have already duties enough to perform, without creating fresh ones; and, again, it is hardly at her age that we best know what befits us.

What enhances my embarrassment is the nearness of M. de Gercourt's return; must this most advantageous marriage be broken off? How, then, are we to make our children's happiness, if it is not sufficient to desire it and devote all our cares to it? You will greatly oblige me by telling me what you would do in my place; I cannot fix upon any course: I find nothing more terrible than to have to decide another's lot, and I am equally afraid of bringing to this occasion the severity of a judge or the weakness of a mother.

I reproach myself unceasingly for augmenting your sorrows by speaking to you of my own; but I know your

heart: the consolation which you could give to others would become to you the greatest you could yourself receive.

Adieu, my dear and revered friend; I await your two replies with much impatience.

Paris, 13th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIRST

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO THE CHEVALIER DANCENY

AFTER what you have brought to my knowledge, Monsieur, nothing is left for me but to be silent and to weep. One regrets that one still lives, after learning such horrors; one blushes to be a woman, when one finds one capable of such excesses.

I will willingly concur with you, Monsieur, so far as I am concerned, in leaving in silence and oblivion all that may have brought about these sad events. I even hope that they may never cause you any other grief than that inseparable from the unhappy advantage which you obtained over my nephew. In spite of his errors, I feel that I shall never console myself for his loss: but my eternal affliction will be the sole vengeance I shall permit myself to obtain from you; I leave it to your heart to appreciate its extent.

If you will permit to my age a reflexion which is rarely made at yours, it is that, were one enlightened as to one's true happiness, one would never seek it outside the bounds prescribed by religion and the laws.

You may rest assured that I will keep faithfully and willingly the deposit you have confided to me, but I

ask you to authorize me to give it up to no one, not even to you, Monsieur, unless it should become necessary for your justification. I venture to believe that you will not refuse me this request, and that you have already realized how often one laments for having indulged in even the most just revenge.

I do not pause here in my requests: convinced as I am of your generosity and delicacy, it would be very worthy of both of these if you were also to place in my hands the letters of Mademoiselle de Volanges, which, apparently, you have retained, and which, doubtless, are of no further interest to you. I know that that young person has wronged you greatly; but I do not think that you have thought of punishing her; and, were it only out of respect for yourself, you will not degrade the object you have so greatly loved. I have no need to add, then, that the consideration which the daughter does not deserve is due at any rate to the mother, to that meritorious woman, in regard to whom you are not without having much to repair: for, after all, whatever illusion one may seek to impose on one's self by a pretended delicacy of sentiment, he who first attempts to seduce a heart still virtuous and simple makes himself, from that fact alone, the first abettor of its corruption, and must be, for ever, responsible for the excesses and errors which ensue.

Do not be surprised, Monsieur, at so much severity on my part: it is the greatest proof I can give you of my complete esteem. You will acquire fresh rights to it still, by lending yourself, as I desire, to the security of a secret the publication of which would do yourself a wrong and deal death to a mother's heart which you have already wounded. In a word, Monsieur, I desire to do this service



to my friend; and, if I could be afraid that you would refuse me this consolation, I would ask you to reflect beforehand that it is the only one you have left me.

I have the honour to be, etc.

At the Château de . . . , 15th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SECOND

MADAME DE ROSEMONDE TO MADAME DE VOLANGES

HAD I been obliged, my dear friend, to await and receive from Paris the enlightenment which you ask me for concerning Madame de Merteuil, it would have been impossible for me to give it you as yet; and doubtless that which I received would have been vague and uncertain: but there has reached me information which I neither expected nor had reason to expect; and this is only too certain. O my friend, how that woman has deceived you!

I shrink from entering into any details of this mass of horrors; but, whatever may be reported, rest assured that it still falls short of the truth. I hope, my dear friend, that you know me well enough to believe my word for it, and that you will require no proofs from me. Let the knowledge suffice you that there exists a mass of them, and that, at this very moment, they are in my hands.

It is not without extreme pain that I beseech you also not to compel me to give a reason for the advice you ask of me, respecting Mademoiselle de Volanges. I recommend you not to oppose the vocation she displays. Assuredly, no reason can justify one in forcing such a condition of life upon one who is not called to it: but sometimes it is a great happiness that it should be so;

and you see that your daughter tells you herself that you would not disapprove, if you knew her motives. He who inspires our sentiments knows better than our vain wisdom what is right for each one of us, and, often, what seems an act of His severity is, on the contrary, one of His clemency.

In short, my advice, which I am quite sensible will afflict you, and which, from that fact alone, you must believe I would not give you unless I had greatly reflected upon it, is that you should leave Mademoiselle de Volanges at the convent, since this step is of her own choice; that you should encourage, instead of thwarting the project she seems to have formed; and that, in awaiting its execution, you should not hesitate to break off the marriage you had arranged.

After fulfilling these painful duties of friendship, and in the impotence in which I am to add any consolation, the one favour it remains for me to beg of you, my dear friend, is to ask me no further questions bearing in any way upon these sad events: let us leave them in the oblivion which befits them; and, without seeking to throw useless and painful lights upon them, submit ourselves to the decrees of Providence, and believe in the wisdom of its views, even where we are not permitted to understand them. Adieu, my dear friend.

At the Château de . . . , 15th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THIRD

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

O MY friend, in what a fearful veil do you envelop my daughter's lot! And you seemed to dread lest I seek to raise it! What, pray, can it conceal which can affect a mother's heart more than the dire suspicions to which you abandon me? The more I think of your friendship, of your indulgence, the more are my torments redoubled: twenty times, since yesterday, have I tried to escape from this cruel uncertainty, and to beg you to let me know all, without considering my feelings and without reserve; and each time I shuddered with dread, when I remembered the prayer you made me not to question you. Finally, I decide upon a course which still leaves me some hope; and I depend upon your friendship not to refuse me what I ask: it is to answer me whether I have, to a certain extent, understood what you might have to tell me; not to be afraid to let me know all that maternal indulgence can forgive, and which it may not be impossible to repair. If my misfortunes exceed this measure, then, indeed, I consent to leave you to explain yourself by silence alone; here then is what I know already, and the point to which my fears extend. My daughter has shewn that she had a certain inclination for the Chevalier Danceny,

and I have been informed that she has gone so far as to receive letters from him, and even to reply to them; but I believed I had succeeded in preventing this error of a child from having any dangerous consequences: to-day, when I dread everything, I can conceive that it may have been possible for my surveillance to have been deceived; and I fear that my misguided daughter may have set a seal upon her wrong doing.

I recall to mind, again, several circumstances which lend weight to this fear. I told you that my daughter was taken ill at the news of M. de Valmont's misfortune; perhaps this sensitiveness was merely due to her thought of the risks M. Danceny had run in this combat. Afterwards, when she shed so many tears on learning all that was said of Madame de Merteuil, perhaps what I thought to be the grief of friendship was but the effect of jealousy, or of regret at finding her lover to be unfaithful. Her latest course may again, it seems to me, be explained by the same motive. It often happens that one believes one's self called to God, only because one has revolted against men. Finally, supposing these facts to be true, and that you have been informed of them, you may have found them sufficient to justify the rigorous counsel you gave me.

However, if this be so, whilst blaming my daughter, I should still believe it my duty to try every means to save her from the torments and dangers of an illusory and transient vocation. If M. Danceny is not lost to every sentiment of honour, he will not refuse to repair a wrong of which he is the sole author, and I am entitled to believe that a marriage with my daughter is sufficiently advantageous to gratify him, as well as his family.

This, my dear and revered friend, is the one hope remaining to me; hasten to confirm it, if you can. You may judge how desirous I am that you should reply to me, and what a terrible blow your silence would inflict.<sup>1</sup>

I was about to close my letter, when a gentleman of my acquaintance came to see me, and related the cruel scene which Madame de Merteuil underwent the day before yesterday. As I have seen nobody for the last few days, I knew nothing of this adventure; here is the relation of it, as I have it from an eye-witness:

Madame de Merteuil, on her return from the country on Thursday, alighted at the Italian Comedy, where she had her box; she was alone in it, and, what must have seemed most extraordinary to her, no gentleman of her acquaintance presented himself during the performance. At the close, she entered the withdrawing-room, as was her custom; it was already crowded; a hum was raised immediately, but apparently she was not aware that she was the object of it. She saw a vacant place on one of the benches, and went and sat there; but at once all the women who were there before her rose, as if in concert, and left her absolutely alone. This marked sign of general indignation was applauded by all the men, and the murmurs, which even amounted, it is said, to hooting, were redoubled.

That nothing might be lacking to her humiliation, her ill-luck had it that M. de Prévan, who had shown himself nowhere since his adventure, should enter the withdrawing-room that same moment. As soon as he was recognized, everybody, men and women, surrounded and

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<sup>1</sup> This letter was left unanswered.

applauded him; and he was carried, so to speak, in face of Madame de Merteuil by the crowd, which made a circle round them. I was assured that Madame de Merteuil preserved an appearance of seeing and hearing nothing, and that she did not change her expression! But I think this fact exaggerated. Be that as it may, this truly ignominious situation lasted until her carriage was announced; and, at her departure, the scandalous hooting was redoubled. It is fearful to be related to such a woman. M. de Prévan met with a great reception the same evening from all the officers of his regiment who were present, and there is no doubt but that he will shortly regain his rank and employment.

The same person who gave me these details told me that Madame de Merteuil was seized the following night with a violent fever, which was at first thought to be the effect of the terrible situation in which she had been placed; but it became known yesterday that confluent small-pox had declared itself, of a very dangerous kind. Truly, it would be a piece of good-fortune for her if she were to die of it. They say, further, that all this adventure will damage her case, which is on the point of being tried, and in which they assert that she had need of much favour.

Adieu, my dear and revered friend. I see the wicked punished in all this; but I find no consolation in it for their unfortunate victims.

Paris, 18th December, 17\*\*.



## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FOURTH

THE CHEVALIER DANCENY TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

YOU are right, Madame, and certainly I will refuse you nothing within my power to which you attach any value. The packet which I have the honour to forward you contains all Mademoiselle de Volanges' letters. If you read them, you will see, not without astonishment perhaps, what a wealth of perfidy and ingenuousness can be united. That is, at least, what struck me most, on my last perusal of them.

Above all, can one refrain from the liveliest indignation against Madame de Merteuil, when one reflects with what a hideous pleasure she brought all her pains to bear on the corruption of so much innocence and candour?

No, my love is dead. I retain nothing of a sentiment so basely betrayed; and it is not that which makes me seek to justify Mademoiselle de Volanges. Nevertheless, would not that simple heart, that gentle and pliable character, have been influenced for good more easily even than they were seduced to evil? What young person, issuing similarly from a convent, without experience and almost without ideas, and bringing into the world, as almost always happens then, an equal ignorance of good and evil; what young person, I say, would have been able to

offer more resistance to such culpable artifices? Ah, to be indulgent it suffices to reflect upon how many circumstances beyond our own control the terrible alternative between the delicacy and the depravation of our sentiments depends. You rendered justice to me, then, Madame, in deeming that the wrongs of Mademoiselle de Volanges, which I felt most keenly, did not, however, inspire me with any ideas of vengeance. 'Tis quite enough to be obliged to renounce my love of her! It would cost me too much to hate her.

I needed no reflexion to desire that all which concerns and could harm her should remain for ever unknown to the world. If I have seemed to delay the fulfilment of your desires in this matter, I think I need not conceal my motive from you; I wished to be sure, beforehand, that I was not to be troubled with the consequences of my unfortunate duel. At a time when I was craving your indulgence, when I even dared believe I had some right to it, I should have feared to have too much the appearance of buying it by this condescension on my part; and, convinced of the purity of my motives, I was proud enough, I will confess, to wish you to be left in no doubt of them. I hope you will pardon this delicacy, perhaps too susceptible, in view of the veneration which you inspire in me, and the value which I attach to your esteem.

It is the same sentiment which bids me ask of you, as a last favour, to be so good as to let me know if, in your judgment, I have fulfilled all the duties which have been imposed upon me by the unhappy circumstances in which I was placed. Once at ease in this respect, my intention is fixed; I leave for Malta; I will go there to make gladly, and keep religiously, the vows which will separate me

from a world of which, whilst still so young, I have had such good reason to complain; I shall go, in short, to seek to lose, beneath an alien sky, the thought of so many accumulated horrors, whose memory could only sadden and wither my soul.

I am with respect, Madame, your most humble, etc.

Paris, 26th December, 17\*\*.

## LETTER THE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIFTH

MADAME DE VOLANGES TO MADAME DE ROSEMONDE

THE fate of Madame de Merteuil, my dear and revered friend, seems to be at length complete; and it is such that her greatest enemies are divided between the indignation she merits and the pity she inspires. I was right, indeed, in saying that it would be a happiness for her to die of her small-pox. She has recovered, it is true, but she has been fearfully disfigured; and, in particular, she has lost an eye. You will imagine that I have not seen her; but I am told that she is really hideous.

The Marquis de \*\*\*, who never misses an occasion for saying something malicious, said yesterday, in speaking of her, that the disease had transformed her, and that now her soul was to be seen in her face. Unhappily, everyone found the expression just.

A further event has just come to add to her disgrace and to her prejudice. Her case was tried yesterday, and the verdict was given against her unanimously. Costs, damages, restitution of the funds received, all was adjudged to the minors: so that the small remnant of her fortune which was not compromised in this case is absorbed, and more than absorbed, by the costs.

Immediately she received this intelligence, although still

sick, she made her arrangements, and started off at night, alone and posting. Her servants say to-day that none of them would follow her. It is believed she has taken the road to Holland.

This departure makes more noise than all the rest, from the fact that she has carried off her diamonds, a possession of great value, which should have returned to her husband's succession; her plate, jewels; in short, everything that she could; and that she leaves behind her nearly fifty thousand livres of debts. It is a real bankruptcy.

The family is to assemble to-morrow to make arrangements with the creditors. Although only a distant relation, I have offered to contribute, but I shall not be present at this assembly, having to assist at an even sadder ceremony. To-morrow, my daughter takes the habit of a postulant. I hope that you will not forget, my dear friend, that, in making this great sacrifice, I have no other motive for being compelled to it than the silence which you have maintained towards me.

M. Danceny left Paris nearly a fortnight ago. It is said that he is on his way to Malta where it is his intention to remain. There would be still time, perhaps, to recall him!.... My friend!.... My daughter is guilty indeed, then!.... You will forgive a mother, no doubt, for only yielding to this awful certainty with difficulty.

What a fatality has fallen upon me of late, and stricken me in the objects dearest to me! My daughter and my friend!

Who is there who would not shudder, if he were to reflect upon the misfortunes that may be caused by even one dangerous association! And what troubles would one not avert by reflecting on this more often! What

woman would not fly before the first proposal of a seducer! What mother could see another person than herself speak to her daughter, and tremble not! But these tardy reflexions never come until after the event; and one of the most important of truths, as it is; perhaps, one of the most generally recognized, lies stifled and void of use in the whirlpool of our inconsequent manners.

Adieu, my dear and revered friend; I feel at this moment that our reason, which is already so insufficient to avert our misfortunes, is even more inadequate to console us for them.<sup>1</sup>

Paris, 14th January, 17\*\*.

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<sup>1</sup> Private reasons and considerations, which we shall ever make it a duty to respect, force us to halt here.

We cannot, at this moment, give our reader the continuation of *Mademoiselle de Volanges'* adventures, nor acquaint him with the sinister events which culminated the misfortunes, or completed the punishment, of *Madame de Merteuil*.

Perhaps some day it will be in our power to complete this work; but we can give no undertaking in this matter: and, even were we able to do so, we should still deem it our duty first to consult the taste of the public, which has not our reasons for taking an interest in this narration.













